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# NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

**Spring 2016**

Volume 69, Number 2



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**Spring 2016**  
Volume 69, Number 2



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## FROM THE EDITORS

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Thirty years ago, the Goldwater-Nichols Act fundamentally reshaped the way the U.S. military goes about its business. Virtually everyone now on active duty is a child of the Goldwater-Nichols era. Distinct service cultures are still very much with us, but “jointness” is deeply embedded in the way our current military operates and thinks, as well as in the incentive structures that shape officers’ careers. It is legitimate to ask whether this has tended to obscure the unintended consequences and opportunity costs of our current joint system. In “The Effect of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 on Naval Strategy, 1987–1994,” Steven Wills traces the impact of this historic legislation on the Navy’s capacity to engage in strategic planning at the end of the Cold War. The emergence during this period of the regional combatant commands as the nexus of war planning reflected both the Goldwater-Nichols reforms and a dramatically altered strategic environment; a predictable consequence of this was a gradual decline in the strategic planning capability and capacity of the Navy Staff. As Wills indicates, the impact of all this on the Navy has been particularly challenging given the inherently global nature of American naval power. In very recent years, one should note, the Navy broadly has come to recognize the need to reconstitute a cadre of strategic thinkers and planners within its own ranks if it is to sustain its proper role in shaping America’s response to an increasingly threatening global strategic environment. Steven Wills is a retired surface warfare officer and a doctoral candidate in military history at Ohio University.

China’s ongoing efforts to establish a permanent presence in the South China Sea continue to pose a fundamental challenge to regional security and the international legal order. In trying to understand how the Chinese may employ force in the future to advance these efforts, it is important to give careful attention to their past behavior in the region. Toshi Yoshihara, in “The 1974 Paracels Sea Battle: A Campaign Appraisal,” provides a detailed analysis of China’s brief clash with the South Vietnamese navy over control of the Paracel Islands—the first-ever employment of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) against a foreign power. China’s victory, against a better-armed adversary, is a point of pride for today’s PLAN and has generated a substantial Chinese-language literature, much of which is exploited here for the first time. Toshi Yoshihara is a professor in the Strategy and Policy Department of the Naval War College.

To understand the evolution of China's naval capabilities over recent decades, it is important not to neglect the evolution of China's naval leadership. In "Who's at the Helm? The Past, Present, and Future Leaders of China's Navy," Jeffrey Becker offers a detailed assessment of the growing profile of the PLAN throughout the Chinese military establishment and the striking improvements in the professionalism of the current and emerging cohorts of China's naval leadership, above all through enhanced professional military education and greater interaction with foreign navies. Jeffrey Becker is an analyst at the Center for Naval Analyses China Studies Division.

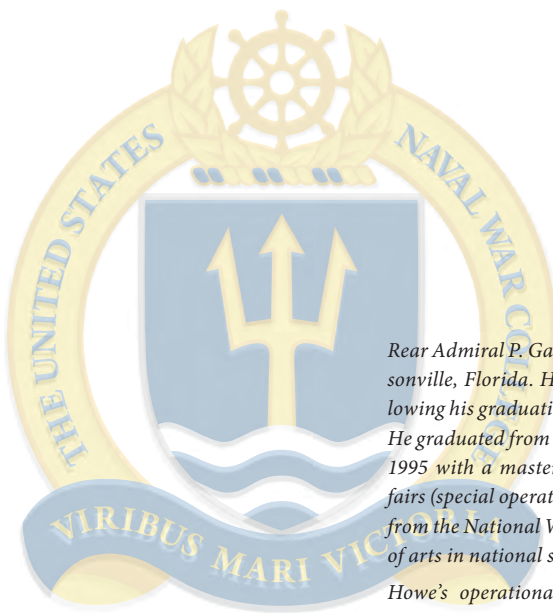
Too often forgotten today, but also of considerable interest, is the maritime dimension of the final stages of the Chinese civil war. In "The Battle of Quemoy: The Amphibious Assault That Held the Postwar Military Balance in the Taiwan Strait," Maochun Miles Yu tells the story of the disastrous 1949 attempt by the People's Republic of China to dislodge a substantial Kuomintang force from the island of Quemoy, strategically situated just offshore of the port of Amoy, the natural embarkation point for an eventual invasion of Taiwan contemplated at the time by Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong. The outcome of this battle had long-term consequences: it secured Taiwan as an independent Nationalist entity and revived flagging American support for the cause of Chiang Kai-shek. Maochun Miles Yu is a professor at the U.S. Naval Academy.

In today's Navy, Alfred Thayer Mahan is more revered than read. Much of this reflects his ponderous and discursive writing style, but also the impression that his thought is hopelessly dated by the prejudices of his time, particularly his favorable view of American imperialism. In "National Interest and Moral Responsibility in the Thought of Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan," Thomas F. X. Varacalli makes a compelling case that Mahan's grand strategic vision was more nuanced and complex than is generally credited, and indeed that it offers an interesting synthesis of elements of contemporary international relations theory that are usually seen as incompatible. Thomas F. X. Varacalli is a doctoral candidate in political science at Louisiana State University.

## IF YOU VISIT US

Our editorial offices are now located in Sims Hall, in the Naval War College Coasters Harbor Island complex, on the third floor, west wing (rooms W334, 335, 309). For building-security reasons, it would be necessary to meet you at the main entrance and escort you to our suite—give us a call ahead of time (401-841-2236).





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## PRESIDENT'S FORUM

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### *The CNO's Design and the Naval War College*

IN THE FIRST WEEK OF JANUARY, Admiral John Richardson, the thirty-first Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), released a document entitled “A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority.” Representing his “commander’s intent” for our Navy as we move forward under his leadership, the document provides a framework for thinking about the challenges we face and the manner in which he wants us to address them. To maximize awareness of this document, we are reprinting it here in the “President’s Forum” for your review and reflection.

I believe it is important to note that the CNO’s guidance is not a “campaign plan” or a “strategy,” but has been explicitly conceptualized as a “design.” With this document, the CNO has set the example for effective leadership in a complex world through its emphasis on decentralized execution and continuous assessment, learning, and adaptation. Acknowledging the increasing complexity of the national security environment, and abiding by the tenets of mission command, the CNO framed his guidance by identifying clear objectives, organizing broad lines of effort (LOEs), specifying the initial key tasks associated with each LOE, and outlining the core attributes we all must demonstrate for our Navy to succeed. The CNO’s “design” approach provides enough specificity to gain synergy across the Navy, while at the same time it provides enough flexibility for organizations to apply the design in a manner consistent with their unique situations.

Here at the Naval War College, we have a professional responsibility to apply this Design to all our efforts across the campus. With the Design’s emphasis on learning and leader development, we are uniquely positioned to contribute, and in many ways we are already executing consistent with the CNO’s guidance. I believe, however, that there are still areas in which we can improve our alignment

with the specific objectives of the four LOEs and the key tasks supporting each. In the months to come, we will review all our education, research, and leader-development efforts from the perspective of the Design, and determine the changes necessary to ensure we are moving forward in accordance with the CNO's guidance. Our collective efforts to focus and act on these changes will ensure the Naval War College steadies on a course that will help the Navy maintain maritime superiority in the decades to come.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the *Review*, and I encourage vibrant discussion in the pages of future issues regarding the Design.

P. GARDNER HOWE III

*Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy*

*President, Naval War College*

## **A DESIGN FOR MAINTAINING MARITIME SUPERIORITY**

### **MISSION**

The United States Navy will be ready to conduct prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea. Our Navy will protect America from attack and preserve America's strategic influence in key regions of the world. U.S. naval forces and operations—from the sea floor to space, from deep water to the littorals, and in the information domain—will deter aggression and enable peaceful resolution of crises on terms acceptable to the United States and our allies and partners. If deterrence fails, the Navy will conduct decisive combat operations to defeat any enemy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

For 240 years, the U.S. Navy has been a cornerstone of American security and prosperity. To continue to meet this obligation, we must adapt to the emerging security environment. The initiatives laid out in this Design represent initial steps along a future course to achieve the aims articulated in the Revised Cooperative Strategy for the 21st Century (CS-21R) in this new environment. It's a tremendously complex challenge. As we get underway, we must first understand our history—how we got to where we are. Moving forward, we'll respect that we won't get it all right, and so we'll monitor and assess ourselves and our surroundings as we go. We'll learn and adapt, always getting better, striving to the limits of performance. This cannot be a "top-down" effort; everybody must contribute.

### **STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT**

On the eve of the 20th century, the United States emerged from the Civil War and laid the foundation to become a global power, but its course to continued prosperity was unclear. Navy Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan helped to chart that course, arguing that American growth required access to overseas markets, which in turn required a preeminent navy to protect that access. America became a nation with global interests, and the seas were the path to new frontiers.

The essence of Mahan's vision still pertains: America's interests lie beyond our own shores. What was true in the late 19th century holds true today—America's success depends on our creativity, our entrepreneurship, and our access and relationships abroad. In an increasingly globalized world, America's success is even more reliant on the U.S. Navy.

In fulfilling our mission, it's important to start with an assessment of the security environment. It is tempting to define the challenge solely in terms of our

allies, partners, and competitors—the state and non-state actors on the world stage. While these are critical, it is even more important to understand the dramatic changes that have taken place on the stage itself—the character of the environment in which competition and cooperation occur. Fundamentally, the world has become dramatically more globalized, and this trend is accelerating. Our way ahead must account for this new reality. In particular, this Design will address three major and interrelated global forces that are increasingly used, increasingly stressed, increasingly important, and increasingly contested. These three forces energize the quickly changing environment in which the Navy must operate, and if required, fight and win.

The first global force is the traffic on the oceans, seas, and waterways, including the sea floor—the classic maritime system. For millennia, the seas have served to connect people and societies to help them prosper. As the global economy continues to expand and become more connected, the maritime system is becoming increasingly used by the United States and the world as a whole. Shipping traffic over traditional sea lanes is increasing, new trade routes are opening in the Arctic, and new technologies are making undersea resources more accessible. This maritime traffic also includes mass and uncontrolled migration and illicit shipment of material and people. The maritime system is becoming more heavily used, more stressed, and more contested than ever before.

A second increasingly influential force is the rise of the global information system—the information that rides on the servers, undersea cables, satellites, and wireless networks that increasingly envelop and connect the globe. Newer than the maritime system, the information system is more pervasive, enabling an even greater multitude of connections between people and at a much lower cost of entry—literally an individual with a computer is a powerful actor in this system! Information, now passed in near-real time across links that continue to multiply, is in turn driving an accelerating rate of change—from music to medicine, from microfinance to missiles.

The third interrelated force is the increasing rate of technological creation and adoption. This is not just in information technologies, where Gordon Moore's projections of exponential advances in processing, storage, and switches continue to be realized. Scientists are also unlocking new properties of commonplace materials and creating new materials altogether at astonishing speeds. Novel uses for increasingly sophisticated robotics, energy storage, 3-D printing, and networks of low-cost sensors, to name just a few examples, are changing almost every facet of how we work and live. Genetic science is just beginning to demonstrate its power. Artificial intelligence is just getting started and could fundamentally reshape the environment. And as technology is introduced at an accelerating rate, it is being

adopted by society just as fast—people are using these new tools as quickly as they are introduced, and in new and novel ways.

These three forces—the forces at play in the maritime system, the force of the information system, and the force of technology entering the environment—and the interplay between them have profound implications for the United States Navy. We must do everything we can to seize the potential afforded by this environment. Our competitors are moving quickly, and our adversaries are bent on leaving us swirling in their wake.

And the competitors themselves have changed. For the first time in 25 years, the United States is facing a return to great power competition. Russia and China both have advanced their military capabilities to act as global powers. Their goals are backed by a growing arsenal of high-end warfighting capabilities, many of which are focused specifically on our vulnerabilities and are increasingly designed from the ground up to leverage the maritime, technological, and information systems. They continue to develop and field information-enabled weapons, both kinetic and non-kinetic, with increasing range, precision, and destructive capacity. Both China and Russia are also engaging in coercion and competition below the traditional thresholds of high-end conflict, but nonetheless exploit the weakness of accepted norms in space, cyber, and the electromagnetic spectrum. The Russian Navy is operating with a frequency and in areas not seen for almost two decades, and the Chinese PLA(N) is extending its reach around the world.

Russia and China are not the only actors seeking to gain advantages in the emerging security environment in ways that threaten U.S. and global interests. Others are now pursuing advanced technology, including military technologies that were once the exclusive province of great powers—this trend will only continue. Coupled with a continued dedication to furthering its nuclear weapons and missile programs, North Korea's provocative actions continue to threaten security in North Asia and beyond. And while the recent international agreement with Iran is intended to curb its nuclear ambitions, Tehran's advanced missiles, proxy forces, and other conventional capabilities continue to pose threats to which the Navy must remain prepared to respond. Finally, international terrorist groups have proven their resilience and adaptability and now pose a long-term threat to stability and security around the world. All of these actors seek to exploit all three forces described above—the speed, precision, and reach that the maritime and information systems now enable, bolstered by new technologies—to counter U.S. military advantages and to threaten the rules and norms that have been the basis of prosperity and world order for the last 70 years.

There is also a fourth 'force' that shapes our security environment. Barring an unforeseen change, even as we face new challenges and an increasing pace, the

Defense and Navy budgets likely will continue to be under pressure. We will not be able to “buy” our way out of the challenges we face. The budget environment will force tough choices, but must also inspire new thinking.

Looking forward, it is clear that the challenges the Navy faces are shifting in character, are increasingly difficult to address in isolation, and are changing more quickly. This will require us to reexamine our approaches in every aspect of our operations. But as we change in many areas, it is important to remember that there will also be constants. The nature of war has always been, and will remain, a violent human contest between thinking and adapting adversaries for political gain. Given this fundamental truth, the lessons of the masters—Thucydides, Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Mao, Corbett, and, yes, Mahan—still apply. America’s importance to the world holds fast. Our nation’s reliance on its Navy—our Navy—continues to grow.

### **WHY A “DESIGN?”**

The scope and complexity of the challenges we face demand a different approach than that offered by a classic campaign plan. This guidance frames the problem and a way forward while acknowledging that there is inherent and fundamental uncertainty in both the problem definition and the proposed solution.

Accordingly, we will make our best initial assessment of the environment, formulate a way ahead, and move out. But as we move, we will continually assess the environment, to ensure that it responds in a way that is consistent with achieving our goals. Where necessary, we will make adjustments, challenging ourselves to approach the limits of performance.

This Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority will guide our behaviors and investments, both this year and in the years to come. More specific details about programs and funding adjustments will be reflected in our annual budget documents.

### **CORE ATTRIBUTES**

One clear implication of the current environment is the need for the Navy to prepare for decentralized operations, guided by commander’s intent. The ability to achieve this end is reliant on the trust and confidence that is based on a clear understanding, among peers and between commanders and subordinates, of the risk that can be tolerated. This trust and confidence is enhanced by our actions, which must reflect our core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Four core attributes of our professional identity will help to serve as guiding criteria for our decisions and actions. If we abide by these attributes, our values should be clearly evident in our actions.



- **Integrity:** Our behaviors as individuals and as an organization align with our values as a profession. We *actively* strengthen each other's resolve to act consistently with our values. As individuals, as teams, and as a Navy, our conduct must always be upright and honorable both in public and when nobody's looking.
- **Accountability:** We are a mission-focused force. We achieve and maintain high standards. Our actions support our strategy. We clearly define the problem we're trying to solve and the proposed outcomes. In execution, we honestly assess our progress and adjust as required—we are our own toughest critic.
- **Initiative:** On their own, everybody strives to be the best they can be—we give 100% when on the job. Our leaders take ownership and act to the limit of their authorities. We foster a questioning attitude and look at new ideas with an open mind. Our most junior teammate may have the best idea; we must be open to capturing that idea.
- **Toughness:** We can take a hit and keep going, tapping all sources of strength and resilience: rigorous training for operations and combat, the fighting spirit of our people, and the steadfast support of our families. We don't give up the ship.

#### FOUR LINES OF EFFORT

The execution of this Design is built along four Lines of Effort that focus on war-fighting, learning faster, strengthening our Navy team, and building partnerships. These lines of effort are inextricably linked and must be considered together to get a sense of the total effort. The corresponding objectives and first year tasks listed under each line of effort define how we will begin to move forward.

***Strengthen Naval Power at and from Sea:*** Maintain a fleet that is trained and ready to operate and fight decisively—from the deep ocean to the littorals, from the sea floor to space, and in the information domain. Align our organization to best support generating operational excellence.

1. Maintain and modernize the undersea leg of the strategic deterrent triad. This is foundational to our survival as a nation.
2. In partnership with the Marine Corps, develop concepts and capabilities to provide more options to national leaders, from non-conflict competition to high-end combat at sea. Operations short of conflict should be designed to contain and control escalation on terms favorable to the U.S. Combat at sea must address “blue-water” scenarios far from land and

power projection ashore in a highly “informationalized” and contested environment. All scenarios must address the threat of long-range precision strike. Test and refine concepts through focused wargaming, modeling, and simulations. Validate these concepts through fleet exercises, unit training, and certification.

3. Further advance and ingrain information warfare. Expand the Electromagnetic Maneuver Warfare concept to encompass all of information warfare, to include space and cyberspace.
4. To better meet today’s force demands, explore alternative fleet designs, including kinetic and non-kinetic payloads and both manned and unmanned systems. This effort will include exploring new naval platforms and formations—again in a highly “informationalized” environment—to meet combatant commander needs.
5. Examine the organization of United States Fleet Forces Command, Commander Pacific Fleet, and their subordinate commands to better support clearly defining operational and warfighting demands and then to generate ready forces to meet those demands.
6. Examine OPNAV organization to rationalize our headquarters in support of warfighting requirements.

***Achieve High Velocity Learning at Every Level:*** Apply the best concepts, techniques, and technologies to accelerate learning as individuals, teams, and organizations. Clearly know the objective and the theoretical limits of performance—set aspirational goals. Begin problem definition by studying history—do not relearn old lessons. Start by seeing what you can accomplish without additional resources. During execution, conduct routine and rigorous self-assessment. Adapt processes to be inherently receptive to innovation and creativity.

1. Implement individual, team, and organizational best practices to inculcate high velocity learning as a matter of routine.
2. Expand the use of learning-centered technologies, simulators, online gaming, analytics, and other tools as a means to bring in creativity, operational agility, and insight.
3. Optimize the Navy intellectual enterprise to maximize combat effectiveness and efficiency. Reinvigorate an assessment culture and processes.
4. Understand the lessons of history so as not to relearn them.

***Strengthen Our Navy Team for the Future:*** We are one Navy Team—comprised of a diverse mix of active duty and reserve Sailors, Navy Civilians, and our families

—with a history of service, sacrifice, and success. We will build on this history to create a climate of operational excellence that will keep us ready to prevail in all future challenges.

1. Aggressively pursue implementation of the core tenets of the “Sailor 2025” program—fully integrated and transparent data and analytics, increased career choice and flexibility, expanded family support, and tailored learning.
2. Accelerate “Sailor 2025” efforts to leverage information technology to enhance personnel system and training modernization efforts.
3. Strengthen and broaden leadership development programs to renew and reinforce the Navy Team’s dedication to the naval profession. Leader development will be fleet-centered and will begin early in our careers, focusing on character and commitment to Navy core values. Character and leadership will be rewarded through challenging assignments and advancement.
4. Strengthen organizational integrity by balancing administrative requirements with the benefits gained from the time spent. The goal will be to return more time to leaders and empower them to develop their teams.
5. Strengthen the role of Navy leaders in leading and managing civilian professionals as key contributors to the mission effectiveness of our Navy Team.

***Expand and Strengthen Our Network of Partners:*** Deepen operational relationships with other services, agencies, industry, allies, and partners—who operate with the Navy to support our shared interests.

1. Enhance integration with our Joint Service and interagency partners at all levels of interaction, to include current and future planning, concept, and capability development and assessment.
2. Prioritize key international partnerships through information sharing, interoperability initiatives, and combined operations; explore new opportunities for combined forward operations.
3. Deepen the dialogue with private research and development labs, and academia. Ensure that our Navy labs and research centers are competitive and fully engaged with their private-sector partners.
4. Increase the volume and range of interaction with commercial industry. Seek opportunities through non-traditional partners.

## DESIRED OUTCOME

A Naval Force that produces leaders and teams who learn and adapt to achieve maximum possible performance, and who achieve and maintain high standards to be ready for decisive operations and combat.

## CONCLUSION

We will remain the world's finest navy *only* if we all fight each and every minute to get better. Our competitors are focused on taking the lead—we must pick up the pace and deny them. The margins of victory are razor thin—but decisive! I am counting on your integrity, accountability, initiative, and toughness to execute the lines of effort described in this Design, execute our mission, and achieve our end state. I am honored and proud to lead you.

JOHN M. RICHARDSON



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## THE EFFECT OF THE GOLDWATER-NICHOLS ACT OF 1986 ON NAVAL STRATEGY, 1987–1994

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*Steven Wills*

In late 1990, veteran U.S. Navy strategist Captain Peter M. Swartz was preparing to return to the United States after a three-year joint assignment at the U.S. mission to NATO in Brussels, Belgium. Swartz desired to return to the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) and to the business of naval strategy in which he had been so engaged during the previous decade. Swartz was advised strongly by his mentor in Brussels, Admiral Jim Hogg, the U.S. military representative to NATO's Military Committee, to take instead a position as a special assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Colin Powell, U.S. Army. Swartz reiterated that he was not interested in yet another joint job but instead desired to return to the business of creating and disseminating naval strategy. He checked, however, with various Navy colleagues and friends. He was surprised at how many old Navy friends told him the job working for General Powell was “a plum assignment”; they unanimously urged him to take it. One front-running naval officer went so far as to suggest that if Swartz did not want it, he should let that officer know immediately, so he could bid for it. Admiral Hogg grew impatient and gave Swartz one more day to make up his mind. He accepted the position.

Swartz plunged immediately into his new job, which involved a very close and positive working relationship with General Powell—just when Saddam Hussein was wreaking havoc on Kuwait and threatening Saudi Arabia. As Swartz found his way around the Pentagon again, he noticed a very high level of Navy talent on the Joint Staff—talent that had never been assigned there by the Navy in all his previous experience in the Pentagon during the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast,

when he returned to visit his old haunts and reestablish his Washington Navy network, he was nonplussed by the decline in the experience base and educational background in some OPNAV shops.

Swartz had an occasion in September 1990 to visit the Joint Staff J8 office to get input on a project he was working on for General Powell. While there, he spoke to Commander Joe Sestak, whom he knew by reputation and whose Harvard doctoral dissertation on the Seventh Fleet Swartz had previously read and exploited. Swartz commented to Sestak that he found the disparity of talent between OPNAV and the Joint Staff both new and disconcerting; he feared for the future intellectual prowess of those in OPNAV and other key Navy institutions. This was a particular concern for Swartz since he had participated in and fostered that prowess during his years in OPNAV in the 1980s as an author of and advocate for the Maritime Strategy. Sestak responded, "Captain, you've been away. Goldwater-Nichols happened while you were gone, don't you remember? Do you remember how hard you and your colleagues fought against it? Do you remember that you lost?"<sup>1</sup>

### INITIAL IMPACT

Sestak's short response encapsulated a significant period of change for the Navy from 1989 to early 1994. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 significantly changed the way the nation, and particularly the U.S. Navy, approached the business of strategy. Alterations to the military chain of command that the legislation brought about had officially separated the leaders of the Navy from the service's operational forces as regional, combatant commander-based strategy replaced that of centralized, service-based global leadership. The physical domains of those regional commanders also increasingly cut across traditional naval geographic command boundaries. In addition to removing the responsibility for strategy from the Navy's leadership, the Goldwater-Nichols Act effectively dispersed the naval service's informal but highly effective cohort of strategic experts who had been responsible for decades of naval strategy, removed them from naval control, and scattered them in assignments on the Joint Staff and the regional and functional commanders' (CINC) staffs. The personnel changes the legislation brought about forced many strategy experts like Swartz into joint jobs instead of their traditional billets on the OPNAV staff.

This initially had a very positive effect: seasoned, knowledgeable, and experienced naval strategists were now populating influential joint staffs, where their capabilities and concepts ensured that the nation continued to deploy and use its naval power sensibly. OPNAV office OP-06, the professional home of naval strategic concepts during the Cold War, still had a reasonably positive reputation and attracted some of the Navy's brightest officers at the end of the 1980s.

However, as young officers sought important jobs in Washington, they increasingly recoiled from assignment to OPNAV, instead embracing joint strategy duty as an essential ticket on the way to flag rank. Many continued to look for joint assignments for their next tour in Washington, while others sought billets in those OPNAV offices with strong connections to their warfare communities. Thus, after Goldwater-Nichols the “bench” at OP-06 began to weaken, and entering the 1990s its strength continued to slide.

This combination of change in command structure, alteration of traditional naval concepts of the battle space, and migration of Navy strategy experts from OPNAV to the Joint Staff altered the Navy’s concept of strategy. The Navy’s most senior officers no longer controlled the forces they built, trained, and equipped. The concepts of naval strategy that remained in the wake of Goldwater-Nichols were regional rather than global in character. Finally, the legislation’s joint personnel requirements effectively served to disband the Navy’s carefully constructed cohort of strategic experts, dispersing them throughout the joint force. While perhaps useful in the first decade after the end of the Cold War, these changes would have significant impacts in the first decade of the twenty-first century as the Navy sought new strategic solutions to a dwindling budget and an aging, contracting force structure.

## GENESIS OF THE LEGISLATION

The Goldwater-Nichols Act was the most significant shake-up in the Department of Defense since its creation in 1949.<sup>2</sup> The failure to achieve desired results during the Vietnam War may have been the early catalyst for the defense reform movement of the late 1970s, but events that followed provided further impetus for change. A series of military disasters since the end of the Vietnam War—including the failure to rescue hostages in the SS *Mayaguez* and Iran hostage crises of 1973 and 1979–81, respectively, and problems with interservice planning and communication during the 1983 Lebanon peacekeeping mission and invasion of Grenada—provided significant impetus for reform.<sup>3</sup> The impression of excessive defense spending resulting from soaring Reagan administration military budgets caught the eye of some members of Congress and helped generate additional legislative-branch interest in defense reform.<sup>4</sup>

The reform movement had strong support within Congress and from some key Reagan administration officials and the defense intellectual community. Congressional supporters such as cosponsors Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) and Representative Bill Nichols (D-Ga.), Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), and Representatives Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) and Les Aspin (D-Wis.) felt that greater centralization of power in the CJCS office would improve the quality of advice available to the nation’s civilian leadership. Goldwater called the legislation “the only

goddamn thing I have ever done in the Senate that was worth a damn.”<sup>5</sup> Reagan administration members such as National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane supported reform efforts, as did former Deputy Defense Secretary David Packard, whom President Reagan appointed chairman of a presidential blue-ribbon commission on defense reform. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger was not in favor of reform at first, but later shifted his position—for practical reasons, rather than due to an actual change in his beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

The Navy and Marine Corps leadership, including Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral James D. Watkins and Marine Corps Commandant General P.

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*The legislation's joint personnel requirements effectively served to disband the Navy's carefully constructed cohort of strategic experts, dispersing them throughout the joint force.*

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X. Kelley, were generally opposed to the legislation, as they believed it restricted their traditional freedom of action and gave other services uninformed control over ship-

building and naval and marine operations. Navy Secretary John Lehman offered the most vocal criticisms of the proposed legislation and quickly became the effective leader of the opposition. He stated that the proposed legislation would create inefficient bureaucracy in the Defense Department and reduce the quality of military advice offered to the president. Lehman also opposed concentrating so much power in the office of the CJCS, which would restrict advice flowing to the president to “the opinion and decision of one man, the chairman himself, and his general staff bureaucracy.”<sup>7</sup> Lehman’s opposition campaign was so well organized and effective that Senator Goldwater wrote directly to Defense Secretary Weinberger and President Reagan to complain that the efforts of Lehman’s staff were illegal.<sup>8</sup>

Despite opposition, and reinforced by findings from Packard’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management, the legislation passed Congress by a significant bipartisan majority in both the House of Representatives (383–27) and Senate (95–0).<sup>9</sup>

Although hailed as a great triumph for the defense reform movement, the Goldwater-Nichols Act was more of an incomplete armistice than a “victory on the Potomac,” as the act’s author James Locher contended in his 2002 book. In fact, defense reformers had a considerably more radical plan to change fundamentally the structure of senior military leadership and the armed forces’ organization for combat. The Senate Armed Services Committee Staff study entitled *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, authored by Locher, contained ninety-one specific recommendations. It specifically suggested the disestablishment of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) in favor of a Joint Military Advisory Council independent of all service functions; a reorganization of the military along

mission, rather than service, lines; and removal from the chain of command of service component commanders located within the unified commands.<sup>10</sup>

Locher has officially dismissed these proposals as diversionary “bullet traps” designed to divert antireform opponents from more-moderate goals.<sup>11</sup> Yet similar recommendations appear in the memoirs of Senator Goldwater as well as those of Senator John Tower.<sup>12</sup> There had also been strong arguments from analysts influenced by the policies of Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara for reorganization of the Defense Department around joint missions rather than geographic or service constructs ever since the Symington Commission of 1961, which recommended the abolition of the separate civilian military departments, the replacement of the JCS with a group of senior officers separated from their respective service affiliations, and the reduction in authority of the individual service chiefs to mere administrative and logistics duties.<sup>13</sup> This evidence suggests that pro-reform advocates had a much longer list of objectives that were not met in the Goldwater-Nichols legislation. The inability of the reform camp to implement fully the more comprehensive reforms suggests that Secretary Lehman’s opposition movement was highly effective in preventing significant alteration to U.S. defense organization. The partial reform that was implemented made for an uncertain climate as the military services grappled with the problem of creating strategy in the post-Cold War era.

## SUBSTANCE AND EFFECTS OF THE ACT

The legislation had three significant effects on the creation of military strategy within the services and in the Department of Defense at large. It elevated the CJCS to the position of principal military adviser to the president. It gave each regional combatant commander greater power over his or her organization and regional strategy at the expense of service chiefs. These first two changes further restricted service leaders’ abilities to influence the development of strategy and formulation of the defense budget, as well as the roles and force structure of the services. Finally, the Goldwater-Nichols Act had the effect of diverting talented officers from their traditional roles on service staffs to the heretofore less-desirable joint and CINC staffs. The services’ own abilities to create and advocate new comprehensive, global, strategic concepts withered in this new environment.

As the 1980s came to a close it became evident the Navy would need to implement the provisions of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation in an environment in which “senior four-star officers no longer had control of the fleet.”<sup>14</sup> While the service chiefs had been organizationally removed from the military chain of command in 1958 as part of the Eisenhower reform package, they retained significant influence over operational forces. This influence was apparent in the production and evolution of the 1980s-era Maritime Strategy. While anchored in the Navy’s

traditional responsibility to provide naval force through the six-hundred-ship Navy concept, the Maritime Strategy also served as a “contingent warfighting doctrine” describing how the U.S. Navy proposed to combat the Soviet Union across the multiple regional commands.<sup>15</sup>

The Maritime Strategy was the latest in a series of naval strategic documents from the late 1940s to the 1980s that sought to articulate the Navy’s place in Cold War national strategy. These documents generally had been produced at the behest and under the guidance of the CNO and the Secretary of the Navy. Some regional combatant commanders resisted this influence at the time. They, not the CNO, were responsible for the employment of combat units against the enemy. Future CJCS, then-Pacific commander Admiral William Crowe responded to a 1984 presentation of the Maritime Strategy, saying, “I’m not sure why the CNO needs a maritime strategy; I need one, but he doesn’t.”<sup>16</sup> This was an ironic statement, since Admiral Crowe, while serving on the OPNAV staff (OP-06; Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Strategy, Plans, and Policy) during the mid-1970s, had been responsible for creating the OPNAV staff office specifically charged with strategy creation (OP-603) and filling it with strategy experts.<sup>17</sup> Dividing up the fleet into theaters subject to the individual war-fighting concepts of individual CINCs, not to mention the CINCs’ reluctance to deploy their own ships across CINC boundaries, hamstrung the Navy’s attempts to organize, train, and equip its forces to deter or confront the Soviet Union.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act seemed, at the time, to settle this argument in favor of the primacy of the CJCS and combatant commanders over the service chiefs. The legislation elevated the chairman from a position of first among equals to that of principal military assistant to the president and gave the chairman the authority to convene, set the agenda for, and preside over the meetings of the JCS.<sup>18</sup> While individual members of the JCS were not prohibited from offering separate advice to the president on their own initiative, the chairman’s own advice took priority in presidential review over that offered by other service chiefs.<sup>19</sup> The chairman was also given significant authority over the strategic planning and assessment functions of the JCS, with responsibility for providing strategic direction and preparing strategic, logistics, and mobility plans for the armed forces.<sup>20</sup> The Goldwater-Nichols legislation did not make the chairman a “supreme commander of the military services,” as some reformers proposed, but it did demand that combatant commanders communicate with the Defense Secretary and president through the CJCS officeholder, thus making the chairman a “de facto” supreme commander in the eyes of some.<sup>21</sup> The service chiefs retained their authority to train, equip, and provide forces to the combatant commanders, but responsibility for strategy appeared, at that time, to reside firmly in joint hands. These provisions would make comprehensive, global, service-based

strategic concepts much more difficult to create and implement in the post-Goldwater-Nichols era.

## EFFECTS ON PLANNING

The effects of the legislation soon manifested themselves in the first post-Goldwater-Nichols Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan in early 1987. Intelligence reporting at that time indicated that a Soviet attack would be evident at least two weeks before it started, thus giving planners time to reinforce Western forces on the Central European front.<sup>22</sup> This appraisal led to some planning reassessments regarding where to focus primary U.S. efforts early in a global conflict. Believing that constrained resources might force decision makers to choose between preparing for a global and preparing for a regional war, Joint Staff planners in 1987 had attempted to incorporate greater emphasis on regional planning in the National Military Strategy Document (NMSD) for fiscal years 1990–94.<sup>23</sup> The continued reduction of the Soviet threat, particularly the Soviets' decreasing ability to project power rapidly into Central Europe and the Persian Gulf, allowed Joint Staff planners to focus more on regional strategies. The director of the Joint Staff Planning Office (J5) in 1989, Major General George Lee Butler, made the projection of increased warning time a justification for greater focus on regional planning.<sup>24</sup>

The impending end of the Cold War and expected drawdown in defense spending occupied the efforts of other Joint Staff offices. The new office of the Force Structure, Resource, and Assessments Directorate (J8), a direct product of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, conducted a review of several force-reduction strategies entitled the "Quiet Study." However, the departing chairman, Admiral Crowe, did not want to recommend force reductions in the absence of a new presidential strategy.<sup>25</sup> But J8 conducted a second Quiet Study that further focused on regional instead of global conflicts.

The study's conclusions were embraced by the new chairman, whose own assumptions on the change to regional strategy were closely aligned with the language of the Quiet Study 2 report. The appointment of General Colin Powell to the chairmanship by President George H. W. Bush in 1989 significantly aided in the transformation from global to regional-based strategy. General Powell embraced the new authority granted him under Goldwater-Nichols "with alacrity" and used it to advance a post-Cold War agenda of change.<sup>26</sup> General Powell expanded the J5 and J8 projects into a combined effort that eventually recommended a 25 percent cut in overall military strength in conjunction with the change to a regional strategic focus. A briefing entitled "A View to the 90s" was produced that encapsulated the views of the chairman as well as Defense Secretary Richard Cheney, who largely agreed with Powell's assessment. These



changes also were incorporated into the president's National Security Strategy and the Defense Planning Guidance (DPG), which were both products of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation.

### THE BATTLE IS JOINED

General Powell's full presentation of these changes at a 26 February 1990 meeting of the Joint Chiefs and regional commanders was the services' first chance to oppose or propose changes to the chairman's concept. The Navy, under the leadership of CNO Admiral Carlisle Trost, disagreed with the naval force structure outlined in "A View to the 90s." Admiral Trost believed the Soviet Union still posed a global naval threat, and he had two specific complaints about the proposed force structure—which related directly to the effects of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. First, and most important, "the Navy had not been a part of the development of the force before it was 'laid on the table' with the strategy, and thus was not privy to the analysis that validated its size and capabilities."<sup>27</sup> Second, due to this lack of naval participation, the proposed naval force was too small to be effective in the rotational forward presence mission it was intended to fill.<sup>28</sup>

Admiral Trost was fighting an uphill battle. Before his planned testimony on force posture in April 1990, Senate Armed Services Committee members Senators Sam Nunn and John Warner (R-Va.) both said that the "Chiefs needed 'to come up here with a different story this year, it's time to reduce.'"<sup>29</sup> It was passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act that enabled Powell to create naval force structure recommendations without input from the Navy's service chief, and made possible congressional favoring of Powell's proposal over the objections of the responsible service chief. As one chief noted, "[T]he planning for the defense build-down was a case of someone determining in advance what was needed, and then seeing that the result was produced."<sup>30</sup>

General Powell further strengthened the hand of joint versus service-based planning in the research, planning, and implementation of the first national military strategy (NMS) associated with the new NMSD and DPG. There was broad agreement that a change in focus from global to regional-based strategies was in order, although some global plans against residual Soviet action persisted.<sup>31</sup> These concepts formed the basis of the 1991 Contingency Planning Guidance (CPG) document, which "established a new framework for operational planning based upon both the changes that had taken place in the strategic environment and expected force reductions."<sup>32</sup> The CPG in turn was the basis for the Joint Strategic Contingency Planning document that was the basis for the new, 1991 NMS that was adopted on 27 January 1992.<sup>33</sup> The latter document directed the regional commanders in chief to "prepare operational plans that focused on regional threats."<sup>34</sup> The service chiefs all objected to the new strategy, to a degree,



but when confronted with President Bush's demand to reduce the defense budget owing to the end of the Cold War, they quickly assented and moved to protect their respective budgets.<sup>35</sup> The results of the Gulf War also appeared to "validate the conceptual underpinnings of the new military strategy," discouraging further argument over its scope and implementation.<sup>36</sup>

These changes were especially hard on the Navy. It struggled to adjust to a new national military strategy, a new force structure determined by outsiders, and a fundamental shift in the service's own maritime strategy concepts. Admiral Frank Kelso II, who replaced Admiral Trost as CNO in 1990, had planned to write a comprehensive naval plan on a logical reduction of naval forces for the postwar world, but could not gain the concurrence of the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of Defense fast enough to get ahead of General Powell's efforts.<sup>37</sup> The results of Kelso's efforts later appeared in the Naval Institute *Proceedings* in April 1991. Kelso said, "I never got approval to publish the article in time for it to have the effect I desired. It was finally published after General Powell came up with a 450-ship Navy that he called a base force. The article had absolutely zero effect or impact, because it was not a 'put your step forward.' It was 'Okay, you've been drug down ship by ship now.' In other words, it came after the fact that the reductions had started."<sup>38</sup>

Not only was the senior naval leadership no longer in command of the fleet, those leaders' opinions on naval strategy and force structure were rejected in favor of those of an army general. While defense cuts were inevitable in the wake of the Cold War, as they had been after the Second World War, in this case the CJCS rather than the CNO or even the Secretary of the Navy made the recommendation to Congress and the president about what naval forces would be retained. The Navy's inability to exert influence on its own size, composition, and missions would negatively impact the ability of naval leadership to create strategy from 1991 onward.

## THE NEW PERSPECTIVE

The chairman's new powers also extended to the strategic orientation of the services. Before 1986, naval officers involved in strategic and operational planning had been accustomed to think of broad ocean areas as single conceptual units, and the older naval organization of the Atlantic and Pacific commands had reinforced that way of thinking.<sup>39</sup> The chairman's new powers, however, included the right periodically to review and adjust the missions, responsibilities, geographic boundaries, and force structure of each combatant command.<sup>40</sup>

The Navy had historically seen the whole of the world's oceans as a unitary theater of action uniquely suited to naval control. The service had not, however, fully articulated this concept on paper until the creation of the first version of

the Maritime Strategy in October 1982.<sup>41</sup> Naval leaders had also been loath to give land-based commanders any control over ocean areas, owing to their belief in a unitary global ocean battle space.<sup>42</sup> But while a global Cold War supported the Navy's view, its end allowed for the development of a number of regional strategies.

General Powell's "A View to the 90s" briefing was based on his vision that the disintegration of the Soviet empire called for new regional strategies that should assume the United States would remain a superpower because of its military capabilities, forces, and alliance relationships.<sup>43</sup> His solution to this challenge involved reshaping not only the force structure but the geographically defined battle space in which that force operated. Naval historian John Hattendorf described the effect of this change on the Navy as one of "structural change in command authority" that "had the intended effect of increasing joint strategic and operational planning in specific geographical locations," but "also had the unintended effect of making it more difficult to implement coordinated concepts for oceans—the natural geographical unit of maritime space."<sup>44</sup>

This process had begun even before Powell was appointed chairman. The 1987 review of combatant command (COCOM) boundaries required by the Goldwater-Nichols Act generated several disputes between the services. The Army attempted to revive a previous plan for a subordinate unified Northeast Asia Command centered on the Korean Peninsula, but this requirement was rejected in the course of the Joint Chiefs' review.<sup>45</sup> Of more concern was an appraisal of whether U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) should assume responsibility for the eastern Mediterranean water space directly adjacent to the "confrontational" states of Israel, Syria, and Lebanon.<sup>46</sup> CNO Admiral Trost counterproposed that both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf be reassigned to U.S. Pacific Command, arguing that "USCINCCENT could not carry out his mission without command of the seas stretching all the way back to the California coast, which was USCINCPAC's responsibility." In the end, the JCS review made only a moderate change—it assigned limited areas of the Gulfs of Oman and Aden to USCENTCOM—and even so Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger had to intervene personally to settle the situation.<sup>47</sup> The Navy's objections to the proposed changes to COCOM oceanic boundaries demonstrated the service's concept of a unified ocean area of responsibility within which the inherent maneuverability, reach, power, and flexibility of naval forces could be optimally deployed and redeployed to meet the nation's challenges.

The Navy had mixed success in retaining its traditional maritime responsibilities during General Powell's 1991 COCOM review. The new Strategic Command and U.S. Atlantic Command (USACOM) had force structures favorable to naval leadership, but USACOM acquired maritime geographic responsibilities over the

objections of the Navy and Marine Corps leadership. General Powell in particular desired that the Navy gunnery range in Vieques, Puerto Rico, be available for joint exercises.<sup>48</sup>

### CHANGES THROUGH THE '90s

These adjustments to COCOM boundaries and areas of responsibility were minor in comparison with changes in the late 1990s. But it was the chairman's greater Goldwater-Nichols-mandated authority that made them possible, and they supported the continued shift from a global to a regional-based strategy in the aftermath of the Cold War.

The 1992 presidential DPG read, "We can shift our defense planning from a focus on the global threat posed by the Warsaw Pact to focus on the less-demanding regional threats and challenges we are more likely to face in the future."<sup>49</sup> This document further identified four elements of the regional defense concept: planning for uncertainty, shaping the future security environment, maintenance of "strategic depth," and continued U.S. leadership to maintain security and prevent the rise of a successor to the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup>

Although the CINC positions were originally designed as regional commanders for a global conflict with the Soviet Union, they took on new prominence after 1991 as the active facilitators of a new world order friendly to U.S. interests. This new role was stated in a 16 April 1992 memo by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz on the contents of the 1992 DPG: "The perceived ability of the U.S. to act independently, if necessary, is thus an important factor, even in the cases where we do not actually do so." Wolfowitz continued:

Our forward presence helps to shape the evolving security environment. We will continue to rely on forward presence of U.S. forces to show U.S. commitment and lend credibility to our alliances, to deter aggression, enhance regional stability, promote U.S. influence and access, and, when necessary, provide an initial crisis-response capability. Forward presence is vital to the maintenance of the system of collective defense by which the United States has been able to work with our friends and allies to protect our security interests, while minimizing the burden of defense spending and of unnecessary arms competition.<sup>51</sup>

While the new post-Cold War national strategy and national military strategy were the original products of the civilian presidential administration and defense secretariat, the principal military inputs came from the office of the chairman and the Joint Staff. The services provided only limited input, confined to a defense of their spending programs. In comparison with the environment in which the Navy had produced the Maritime Strategy, it had now lost control of the argument about the size and composition of its force and how and where it would fight.

## THE NAVY'S LEGACY OF STRATEGISTS

This change in the Navy's fortunes was not due to a deficiency in qualified strategic thinkers. The service had cultivated a cadre of experts since the days of War Plan ORANGE, when Navy strategists such as Charles "Savvy" Cooke and Richmond K. Turner accurately anticipated the maritime strategy and course of the future Pacific war of 1941–45.<sup>52</sup>

This tradition continued throughout the Cold War, with the service mentoring and sustaining a number of experts in naval strategy. While these officers were assigned operational, fleet-related billets in the course of their regular career paths, they were also rotated through a small number of strategic planning offices on the CNO's staff. They often worked in concert with civilian academics at the Naval War College, the traditional home of naval strategic thought and culture since the days of Alfred Thayer Mahan in the late nineteenth century.

These officers were the product of what naval historian John Hattendorf called "[a] resurgence of strategic thinking in the U.S. Navy" in response to the tenure of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara (1961–68), during which long-range planning had been reduced to a series of five-year planning cycles.<sup>53</sup> CNO Admiral Elmo Zumwalt first sought to create a new cadre of strategists through the Naval War College. This effort was not entirely successful. The overall curriculum of the War College improved thanks to the efforts of then-President Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner, but the school did not attract enough of the Navy's best to create a new strategic culture rapidly.<sup>54</sup> Zumwalt's other focus, however—on strategic problems in the Pacific and Indian Oceans—did create the desired strategic culture through the CNO office staffs that worked on these issues.

The CNO OP-06 and the newly created OP-00K (CNO Executive Panel) offices in particular were a veritable breeding ground for naval strategic thinkers over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s. These officers worked in close cooperation with the Office of Naval Intelligence and the Center for Naval Analyses, and did much of the planning and staff work that led to and included the Maritime Strategy of the 1980s. The Navy did have a strategy subspecialty code that officers could acquire through appropriate military or civilian education, but this cadre of strategic experts was informally organized. This was especially true in the case of the strategy experts assigned to the CNO's staff. Captain William Spencer Johnson, who served multiple assignments in the OP-06 office in the 1970s and 1980s, recalled that the executive assistant to the flag officer in charge of OP-06 kept a wooden box in his office with file cards detailing those who had served in OP-06. This simple filing system recorded their current service billets and when they would again be available for service on the OP-06 staff. The admiral in charge of OP-06 essentially had unofficial detailing authority over these

officers, and with the support of Naval Personnel Command could order their return when requested.<sup>55</sup>

The officers who headed the OP-06 office included a number of former fleet commanders, such as Admirals James “Ace” Lyons, Henry “Hank” Mustin, and Charles Larson, as well as future CJCS Admiral William Crowe. Staff members such as Captains Swartz and Johnson completed multiple tours within the OP-06 organization over the course of their careers.<sup>56</sup> Multiple assignments within OP-06 produced a strong but unofficial strategic community of talented men and women within the larger CNO staff.

The efforts of Under Secretary of the Navy Bob Murray stimulated the CNO, Admiral Hayward, to create the CNO’s Strategic Studies Group (SSG) in the

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*“The planning for the defense build-down was a case of someone determining in advance what was needed, and then seeing that the result was produced.”*

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summer of 1981. The group was convened under Murray’s leadership and mentorship, assisted by Commander Kenneth McGruther, Naval Reserve Commander John

Hanley, and others. The initial purpose of the group, according to Commander McGruther, was to “reinforce in the Soviet mind the perception that it could not win a war with the United States, both *before* a war, to enhance deterrence, and at all phases of the war should it occur.”<sup>57</sup>

The first SSG became very influential in determining how elements of the new Maritime Strategy would eventually be employed. Murray desired that the group work on problems of strategy that would be broad enough to be useful, but narrow enough in scope to be reasonably accomplished. The SSG could not accomplish these goals in isolation and would need to travel globally and discuss its proposals with multiple senior officers and staffs.<sup>58</sup> The SSG continued operating over the course of the 1980s and supported further improvements in the emerging maritime strategy.

The other important product coming from both the OPNAV strategy offices and the SSG was the officers themselves, those who gained great professional expertise from their assignments to these groups.<sup>59</sup> They constituted an expanding cadre of strategic-minded officers trained both to create strategy and to anticipate responses to that strategy from opponents. The interaction of the OPNAV strategy offices such as OP-603, the SSG, and naval intelligence experts channeled the inspiration for a new naval strategy to confront the Soviet Union into plans and war-fighting doctrine useful to operational commanders. This group’s combination of operational, academic, and cooperative experience was well suited to the rapid and effective production and updating of strategy-related materials.

The changes wrought by the Goldwater-Nichols legislation would eventually transform this group over time from an officially constituted forum to an ad hoc assembly maintained by the members themselves. This alteration occurred through modification of both missions and personnel composition of these co-operative strategic entities.

One of the most contested aspects of the legislation was the establishment of a rigorous qualification, assignment, and management program for joint-duty officers. Owing to a perceived predilection in the services to assign less-qualified officers to the Joint Staff, Congress required the Secretary of Defense to submit an annual Joint Officer Management report to the legislative branch. This document was to report joint-duty officers' number, promotion rate, and promotion rate in comparison with non-joint-qualified officers, and to which billets each service assigned such officers. This focus on joint assignments caused a significant shift in where the talented officers of each service were assigned.

The OP-06 office had risen to prominence during the 1980s in the course of its work with the Maritime Strategy. CNOs Hayward and Watkins as well as Secretary Lehman valued its inputs and contributions (along with those of the 00K office) to the creation of the NMS and its communication to a wider audience. The emphasis demanded by Goldwater-Nichols on joint versus service-centric activities, however, helped bring about a significant reorganization in the OPNAV office structure that weakened the influence of OP-06 on both naval and wider strategic concerns.

Over the period of 1992–93, CNO Kelso conducted a major reorganization of the OPNAV staff structure in response to the Goldwater-Nichols Act provisions; it was conceptualized and implemented by Vice Admiral Bill Owens, one of the members of the first SSG. OP codes became N-coded offices that mirrored the Joint Staff. A new and powerful N8 office (Integration of Capabilities and Resources) was constructed from the warfare “baron” offices of OP-02, -03, and -05 (Deputy CNOs for submarine, surface, and air warfare, respectively); Owens was the first to head the new office.<sup>60</sup> N8 was considerably more powerful than the old OP-06 in a new world in which Goldwater-Nichols had determined that services only built, trained, and equipped forces, but did not conduct strategic planning for their use. OP-06 itself became N3/N5 and lost influence, as OPNAV had considerably less influence on the Joint Staff now that it worked for the CJCS alone and not the collective Joint Chiefs.<sup>61</sup>

The SSG also changed in form and content, but perhaps less directly than the offices of the OPNAV staff. The SSG moved from being a Cold War naval strategy and operations think tank to being a wider DIME (i.e., diplomacy, information, military, economics) effort.<sup>62</sup> It acquired its first members outside the Navy and Marine Corps in 1993 and its focus became a global search for places where naval



forces would be relevant. Much of this change was precipitated by the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, but some was in response to the activities of the empowered office of the CJCS. The chairman, rather than Navy flag officers, now made force-structure recommendations.

### BUDGET AND OTHER CHALLENGES

Admiral Kelso had replaced Admiral Trost as CNO in June 1990 and was immediately confronted by a host of direct and indirect challenges to the maintenance of a robust naval force structure. Kelso acknowledged in his Senate confirmation hearing that the Maritime Strategy was “on the shelf,” and that the six-hundred-ship Navy concept should be replaced by a more flexible number.<sup>63</sup> The end of the Maritime Strategy and change of CNO leadership created a power struggle in the OPNAV staff as competing offices sought to present new strategic visions to the CNO. This struggle produced a general document known as “The Way Ahead.”<sup>64</sup>

Budget estimates, however, continued to stymie the CNO’s efforts to support his vision functionally. Kelso had hoped to kick off the 1991 budget season with a positive and influential Total Force Assessment briefing to accompany the Navy’s budget proposals. Instead, he got a sobering and dismal appraisal of what force the Navy might field in the post–Cold War era. Captain Richard Diamond, the OP-603 branch chief who gave the brief, recalled that Kelso responded to its contents with a “barrage of scatological invectives and expletives.” One particular slide, entitled “The Coming USN Budget Train Wreck,” predicted that the Navy “was about to face a major budget crisis that made a new strategic rationale mandatory”; it caused the CNO to “go into overdrive” in his negative response.<sup>65</sup> The slide “flipper” for that brief, Commander Paul Giarra, USN (Ret.), said, “The CNO left the room without providing any guidance to the assembled three-star officers present for the brief,” and for a time this caused great uncertainty.<sup>66</sup>

Even so, if the challenges had been limited to dramatically shrinking budgets, Admiral Kelso might have had greater influence on controlling the Navy’s response to the empowered CJCS, but his immediate focus was on troubling service-specific issues. He was, in particular, distracted by negative publicity about the USS *Iowa* B-turret explosion, the Tailhook scandal, and the crash/death of F-14 pilot Lieutenant Kara Hultgreen, USN. In such an environment, Admiral Kelso could not concentrate on strategy as well as he needed to.<sup>67</sup>

### EFFECT ON THE STRATEGY COHORT

The legislation affected not only the Navy offices that created strategy but also the careers of individual naval officers engaged in that effort. The new emphasis on joint, vice service, offices that the Goldwater-Nichols provisions demanded created a significant impact on officers in the ranks of O-4 (lieutenant commander)

to O-6 (captain) who would normally have been recruited to serve in OP-06 (now N3/N5) and other purely service staff positions. Those officers were now drawn to joint positions to meet the new requirements that demanded joint service as a precursor to consideration for flag rank. The service solution was to “shorten some assignments and eliminate others” so that joint assignments could be fitted into the same nominal twenty-year career plan demanded by the 1980 Defense Officer Personnel Management Act.<sup>68</sup>

The addition of joint assignments was further complicated by an overall manpower reduction at the end of the Cold War. The number of Navy joint billets for officers in the ranks of O-4 to O-6 increased by 10 percent over the period 1989–99 in spite of a nearly 15 percent overall postwar decline in the number

of officers in those ranks.<sup>69</sup>

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*The Navy had historically seen the whole of the world's oceans as a unitary theater of action uniquely suited to naval control.*

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These changes also seem to have affected the overall amount of service-based expertise that the average naval

officer acquired over the course of his or her career. A 2001 analysis suggested, “[t]he prescribed tour lengths in Goldwater-Nichols tend to deepen officers’ joint opportunities but may limit the breadth of experience.”<sup>70</sup>

The experience of the strategy cadre of OP-06 would not initially seem to support this assumption. The individuals who spearheaded the drive to create the NMS in the 1980s found continued employment in the strategy business during the 1990s. As noted at the outset, Captain Swartz, after some initial misgivings about having two consecutive joint assignments, became one of General Colin Powell’s special assistants. Captain Diamond became OP-603 (the Strategic Concepts office of OP-06) in February 1990 and exerted significant influence on the development and coordination of the follow-on strategic concept to the NMS known as “. . . From the Sea.”<sup>71</sup> Commander Sestak contributed what Diamond referred to as “the bumper sticker” for the new strategy in the phrase, “The Navy/Marine Corps Team is the Enabling Force for Follow-on Joint Operations.”<sup>72</sup> Diamond, along with Swartz and other OP-60, OP-00K, and SSG alumni, founded a regular naval strategy discussion group that first began meeting in 1988.<sup>73</sup>

Yet while these officers continued their strategic vocation in both Navy and later joint offices involved in producing strategic work, their shoes were not being filled by a new generation of Navy-created strategy experts. The provisions of the Goldwater-Nichols Act appear to be the direct cause of this change, in the eyes of some of these experts. Captain R. Robinson “Robby” Harris, a former member of the SSG and 00K, has suggested that the OPNAV staff in general is “a shadow of what it was twenty years ago in both quantity and background” owing to the changes caused by the legislation’s joint-officer requirements.<sup>74</sup> The new



requirements for joint assignment appeared to have harmed the ability of the Navy to send officers to multiple tours within OPNAV strategy offices. Captain Johnson believes that the joint requirements prevented the Navy from sending officers to multiple assignments in OP-06 where they would have acquired further strategic competence and maintained corporate memory in naval strategic planning.<sup>75</sup> Before Goldwater-Nichols, Johnson asserts, it was commonplace for strategy-coded officers to have multiple OPNAV tours in strategic planning offices.<sup>76</sup> Now there is barely time for one such assignment if an officer is also to meet the joint requirements necessary for eligibility for flag rank. This lack of repeat experience in OPNAV has further weakened the Navy's ability to create strategy on its own. Secretary Lehman says the joint requirements have created excessively large staffs that draw too many officers from experience-generating operational billets.<sup>77</sup> Together, these changes have meant a Navy with fewer strategic planners and possibly less operational experience, and have forced it to fill a much larger staff pool, thus leaving it bereft of its own strategic veterans.

#### THE PRICE PAID

Of course the armed forces of the United States were going to face significant cuts in the wake of the Cold War. A new strategy would have emerged in response to this sea change in international affairs alone. The Goldwater-Nichols legislation, however, significantly complicated that process for the U.S. Navy.

The Navy had been the most significant source of organized opposition to the legislation, and its senior officers, at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, remained antagonistic to the law's tenets as it struggled to adjust to a new international situation and a new internal Defense Department organization. The legislation did not have the same impact on Navy strategy as the end of the Cold War, but the empowered CJCS, new concepts in combatant commander area of responsibility, and the personnel changes demanded made the process of creating new strategies for the naval service, especially those involving a global responsibility, more challenging in the years after 1992. The Goldwater-Nichols Act gave the CJCS the decisive voice in determining naval force structure and how maritime geographic areas of responsibility were divided.

Further, the legislation altered the career paths of naval officers by mandating joint assignments as a precursor to flag rank. This action caused a practical migration of talented, career-minded officers out of service offices such as OP-06, where they had been carefully trained, mentored, and subsequently assigned important Navy follow-on assignments, into joint billets in which the Navy could no longer make direct use of their talents. These officers continued to contribute to the process of strategy creation in the 1990s, but there was no longer a strong service staff organization to mentor and aid them in their development.

These changes caused by the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 fundamentally altered the process by which the U.S. Navy developed both strategy and the people involved in that creative process. While these changes did not have a significant negative impact in the first decade after the end of the Cold War, they later affected the Navy's ability to emulate the Maritime Strategy experience and again produce war-winning global strategic concepts in response to regional threats that can no longer be contained by regional planning alone—concepts that effectively employ the inherent mobility, flexibility, and power of a globally deployable, free-ranging, offensively oriented fleet.

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## THE 1974 PARACELS SEA BATTLE

### A Campaign Appraisal

Toshi Yoshihara

On 19 January 1974, the Chinese and South Vietnamese navies clashed near the disputed Paracel Islands. The short but intense battle left China in control of seemingly unremarkable spits of land and surrounding waters in the South China Sea. The skirmish involved small, secondhand combatants armed with outdated weaponry. The fighting lasted for several hours, producing modest casualties in ships and men. The incident merited little public attention, especially when compared with past titanic struggles at sea, such as those of the two world wars. Unsurprisingly, the battle remains an understudied, if not forgotten, episode in naval history.<sup>1</sup>

But its obscurity is undeserved. Newly available Chinese-language sources reveal a far more complex naval operation than is commonly depicted in Western scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Hitherto-unknown details of the battle illustrate how Chinese strategists tailored their tactics so as to coerce, deter, and defeat a rival claimant in the South China Sea. Notably, China employed a mix of conventional and irregular forces to meet its operational objectives. Such hybrid methods not only were common in Chinese naval history, but also foreshadowed the kinds of

combined maritime warfare China has employed recently against its neighbors in maritime Asia, including Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Indeed, Chinese operations in the Paracels represent an archetype that could be employed again in the future. It thus behooves policymakers to pay attention to China's naval past.

The battle was the first step in China's decades-long effort to establish and expand its presence

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in the South China Sea. In 1988, China seized six reefs and atolls of the Spratly Islands after another skirmish with the Vietnamese at Johnson South Reef. In late 1994, the Chinese built structures on Philippines-claimed Mischief Reef, leaving a weak Manila no choice but to accept the fait accompli. In 2012, China compelled the Philippines to yield control of Scarborough Shoal after a standoff at sea over fishing rights in the area. Beginning in late 2013, China embarked on a massive land reclamation project in the Spratlys, building up artificial islands that added up to thousands of acres of land. Some of the man-made islands feature military-grade runways, deep-draft piers to accommodate warships, facilities to host garrisons, and other support infrastructure. China's extension of its maritime power into the South China Sea, which has gathered momentum in recent years, began with the foothold gained in the Paracels.

The conflict and its aftermath also left an outsize and lasting legacy in Asian international relations. The territorial dispute that gave rise to fighting forty years ago remains unresolved and continues to stoke Sino-Vietnamese enmity. When Beijing placed an oil rig in waters close to the Paracels in May 2014, violent protests targeting Chinese businesses broke out across Vietnam. At sea, Vietnamese maritime law enforcement vessels sought to break the security cordon formed around the rig by Chinese civilian, paramilitary, and naval vessels. Amid the standoff, bilateral relations plunged to new lows. The contest, then, is far from over; and the passions the dispute still stirs up trace back to 1974.

The Paracels battle erupted at an inflection point in the history of China's turbulent politics. The nation was still reeling from the Cultural Revolution when the fighting broke out. The radical political movement had so ravaged military readiness that the Chinese navy nearly paid for it with defeat in the Paracels campaign. Mao Zedong devoted attention to the crisis, issuing his last military orders during the conflict before his death two years later. Deng Xiaoping, rehabilitated from the purges of the Cultural Revolution, oversaw the naval campaign. Liu Huaqing formulated fortification plans for the Paracels not long after the smoke had cleared from the battlefield. Deng, the architect of China's reform and opening, and Liu, the father of the modern Chinese navy, would later navigate their nation out of the dark era under Mao. Their roles in this clash likely served them well as they positioned themselves to lead China.

For the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy, or PLAN), the campaign is etched into the service's institutional memory, constituting an essential part of the navy's "glorious history."<sup>3</sup> The "counterattack in self-defense" vanquished South Vietnam's navy and secured China's control over the Paracels.<sup>4</sup> It is considered the PLA Navy's first sea battle against an external enemy. (The fighting against the Nationalists along the mainland coast in the 1950s and 1960s is regarded as an extension of the Chinese civil war.) The battle was also the first time that

the PLAN—then largely a coastal-defense force composed of obsolescent Soviet vessels—operated so far from China’s shores. The disparity in naval power that seemingly favored South Vietnam, (Republic of Vietnam, or RVN) has helped Chinese commentators mythologize the triumph.

The battle’s legacies, ranging from regional animosity to China’s strategic position in the South China Sea, call for a closer reexamination. The availability of relevant Chinese literature now makes it possible to extract insights from the clash. Reconstructing a clearer picture of the Sino-Vietnamese encounter at sea helps to discern the ingredients of the Chinese navy’s operational success. Moreover, a retrospective analysis draws out the continuities in China’s use of force and coercion at sea. In particular, Beijing’s combined employment of military and civilian vessels in 1974 suggests a durable operational preference for hybrid warfare that is evident today in territorial disputes involving China. Such predispositions carry implications for the various rival claimants in the South China Sea and for the United States as the arbiter of security and stability in maritime Asia.

To maximize the analytical value of the naval skirmish, this article first reviews the geographic setting and the historical context of the Paracels dispute. It recounts in greater detail the tit-for-tat maneuvers near the islands that brought China and South Vietnam to conflict. The article then elaborates on the naval battle and its aftermath, as the Chinese have retold them. It furnishes an assessment of the battle, critically analyzing China’s civil-military relations, the operational performance of the PLAN, the role of friction and chance, and the importance of paramilitary forces to Beijing. Finally, the article concludes with some thoughts about how the battle may inform China’s future strategy in the South China Sea and its implications for stakeholders in maritime Asia.

## SOURCES AND METHODS

In recent years, Chinese historical accounts of the Paracels sea battle have proliferated across publicly available sources, including PLAN publications, academic journals, professional periodicals, and popular magazines. Participants in the campaign, from local commanders to tactical personnel, have agreed to interviews or produced their own eyewitness accounts, reflecting on their personal experiences. They have revealed fascinating details about the engagement and have forthrightly offered critical assessments of how the Chinese waged the campaign.

A general openness to debate on politically neutral topics, including naval affairs, partly explains this willingness to engage in frank discussions about the battle. For over a decade the Chinese leadership has permitted a relatively freewheeling discourse among officials, scholars, and commentators of various stripes, encouraging them to hold forth on China’s seaborne future. President Xi Jinping’s vow to transform China into a maritime power has further spurred



seapower advocates to retail narratives that justify the nation's turn to the seas. China's operational success in 1974 tells an uplifting story that dovetails with recent Chinese efforts to promote the navy as a prized national project and to enhance the society's "maritime consciousness." And, in light of Beijing's ambitions and growing capacity to influence events in the South China Sea, the history of the Paracels battle resonates with Chinese audiences.

The attention lavished on this incident opens a window onto China's interpretations of its own naval history.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the literature helps to discern lessons the Chinese have drawn from this battle as well as to identify lessons they may have neglected or chosen to ignore. If these lessons—and false lessons—hold value for China's policymakers and military commanders, the battle may offer insights into current Chinese strategy in offshore disputes. Equally important, Beijing's growing assertiveness in maritime Asia, including its construction of artificial islands in the Spratlys, is likely to increase policy demands in Washington and other Asian capitals to understand better how China views its seascape.

Some caveats about sources and methods merit mentioning. This article is based almost entirely on Chinese writings of the battle, including the PLAN's record of events, recollections of the participants involved in the clash, and secondary sources. China's sparse experiences at sea, especially in the first decades of communist rule, may have compelled Chinese analysts to dramatize overly, and thus potentially distort, their nation's naval successes. Not surprisingly, Chinese accounts frequently portray the enemy unflatteringly while playing up China's virtues. Xenophobic biases and cheap propaganda points abound. What follows, therefore, is not a neutral perspective.

While the Vietnamese side of the story is not represented here, this article draws on the few available English-language memoirs by RVN naval officers who were involved in the clash.<sup>6</sup> It pays special attention to recollections that diverge sharply from the Chinese version of events. Moreover, discrepancies exist among the various Chinese descriptions of the battle. To the extent possible, this article identifies those differences, recognizing that a definitive story is not possible without access to official archives in both China and Vietnam. This is a first cut at an important but largely underappreciated episode in China's march to the seas.

## THE GEOSTRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Paracel (西沙) Islands are roughly equidistant from China and Vietnam, located 300 kilometers south of Yulin, Hainan Island, and 370 kilometers east of Da Nang. The archipelago is composed of coral islands, reefs, and banks divided into two island groups. To the northeast is the Amphitrite (宣德) Group, in which Woody (永兴) Island is the largest feature. To the southwest is the Crescent (永乐) Group, consisting of Pattle (珊瑚), Money (金银), and Robert (甘泉) Islands



## MAP 1 THE PARCEL ISLANDS



Source: Adapted from "Parcel and Spratly Islands: 1988," *Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection*, [www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/).

on the western side and Drummond (晋卿), Duncan (琛航), and Palm (广金) Islands on the eastern side. About eighty kilometers of water separate the Amphitrite and Crescent Groups.

Chinese writings emphasize the geostrategic value of the Paracels, which sit astride critical lines of communications. According to the PLAN's official encyclopedia, "The Paracel Islands serve as China's natural protective screen and outpost. Sea and air routes heading to Singapore and Jakarta from China's coast must pass through this area, giving it an important status."<sup>7</sup> Located about 660 kilometers southwest of the Pratas Islands, 550 kilometers west of Scarborough

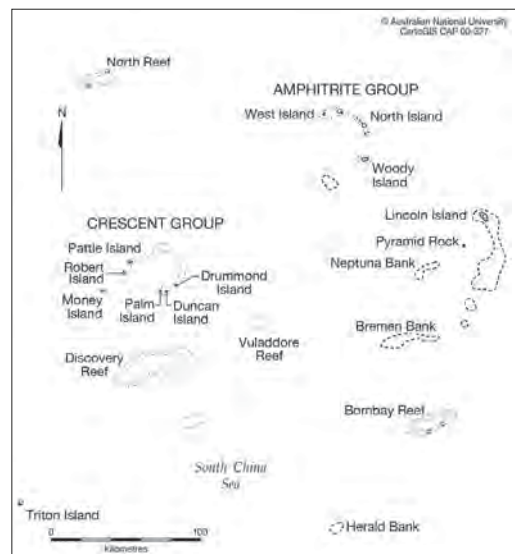
## MAP 2



Source: "Paracel Islands," in Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, [www.cia.gov/](http://www.cia.gov/).

<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol69/iss2/1>

## MAP 3



Source: "Paracel Islands, South China Sea," [CartoGIS] Maps Online: ANU [Australian National University] College of Asia & the Pacific, [asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/](http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/).

Shoal, and 700 kilometers northwest of the Spratly Islands, the centrally positioned archipelago is viewed as an essential stepping-stone to other Chinese-claimed islands across the South China Sea.

After the Second World War, the islands changed hands repeatedly, with countries asserting a confusing array of claims and counterclaims to the Paracels. In 1947, the Nationalists on the Chinese mainland seized control of Woody Island, while the French, employing local Vietnamese troops, occupied Pattle Island at the other end of the Paracels. The communist conquest of Hainan Island, one of the last holdouts of the Chinese civil war, rendered untenable the Nationalist outpost on Woody Island. PLA troops seized the island after the Nationalist forces evacuated it in 1950. In the 1951 San Francisco peace treaty, Japan renounced all its rights and claims to the Paracels and Spratlys but left the transfer of title unresolved. South Vietnam and China subsequently issued official declarations that incorporated the Paracels as sovereign territory, in 1956 and 1958, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, China and South Vietnam occupied two halves of the Paracels. In 1955, a Chinese state-owned company began to mine guano on Woody Island for use as fertilizer back on the mainland. The following year, the French transferred Pattle Island to the Republic of Vietnam. In early 1959, Saigon's navy forcibly evicted Chinese fishermen from Duncan Island, thereby conferring on South Vietnam control over the Crescent Group. Throughout the 1960s, an uneasy stalemate prevailed as both sides built modest facilities and episodically patrolled the waters around the islands.<sup>9</sup> It is likely that the substantial U.S. naval presence in the region and Washington's backing of Saigon deterred China from rolling back South Vietnam's control of the disputed islands.

In the 1970s, the promise of offshore oil intensified the dispute in the South China Sea. In mid-1973, Saigon granted energy exploration rights to Western companies and conducted geological surveys of the waters near the Crescent Group. That year, Beijing explicitly claimed the maritime resources present in waters adjacent to Chinese territory. China, too, began drilling an oil well on Woody Island in December 1973.<sup>10</sup> The convergence of geopolitics, economics, and competing territorial claims soon drew China and South Vietnam into an escalating crisis.

## PRELUDE TO BATTLE

In the summer of 1973, a series of provocations and reprisals set the two sides on a collision course. In August, South Vietnam seized six islands in the Spratlys, and a month later issued a formal declaration extending Saigon's administrative control over ten islands there. In October, two Chinese fishing trawlers, Nos. 402 and 407, appeared near the Crescent Group and began to work there.

The crewmen planted Chinese flags on islands over which the Vietnamese had established nominal control. They also set up a logistics team on Duncan Island, reestablishing a presence there, from which South Vietnam had evicted them more than a decade before.<sup>11</sup> In November, South Vietnamese warships began to harass the Chinese fishing boats, ramming them and arresting fishermen on board. Some of the captured Chinese were reportedly brought to Da Nang, where they were forced to confess their alleged crimes and acknowledge Saigon's sovereignty over the islands.

On 10 January 1974, the crews of the two Chinese fishing boats constructed a seafood processing plant on Robert Island.<sup>12</sup> The following day, the Chinese foreign ministry reiterated China's indisputable sovereignty over the Paracel Islands, the Spratly (南沙) Islands, and Macclesfield (中沙) Bank. Four days later, the RVN Navy dispatched the frigate HQ-16 to the Crescent Group. Upon encountering fishing boats Nos. 402 and 407 near Robert Island, HQ-16 ordered the two vessels to leave the area.<sup>13</sup> The frigate then fired warning shots at them and shelled Robert Island, blasting the Chinese flag planted there. On 17 January, the destroyer HQ-4 arrived on the scene to support HQ-16. Commandos on board HQ-4 landed on Robert and Money Islands, pulling down Chinese flags there. The following day, HQ-4 and HQ-16 rammed fishing vessel No. 407, damaging it. That evening, frigate HQ-5 and fleet minesweeper HQ-10 joined in.<sup>14</sup>

After receiving reports from Nos. 402 and 407 about the RVN's naval activities, China began to sortie its forces. On 16 January, the South Sea Fleet ordered two *Kronshtadt*-class submarine chasers, Nos. 271 and 274, to reach Woody Island as soon as possible. The two warships hurried to their destination from Yulin naval base on Hainan Island. After picking up armed maritime militia, ammunition, and supplies at Woody Island the next day, Nos. 271 and 274 proceeded to the Crescent Group. The commanders were under strict instructions to follow three don'ts: (1) don't stir up trouble; (2) don't fire the first shot; and (3) don't get the worst of it.<sup>15</sup> J-6 fighters (the Chinese version of the MiG-19) provided air cover during the flotilla's transit, but their limited range permitted only five minutes of loiter time over the Paracels.<sup>16</sup> The warships would have to fend for themselves.

The two sub chasers reached the Crescent Group on the evening of 17 January and landed four armed militia platoons (each numbering ten members) on Duncan, Drummond, and Palm Islands in the wee hours of 18 January.<sup>17</sup> At about the same time, two Guangzhou-based Type 010 oceangoing minesweepers, Nos. 389 and 396, rushed to the Paracels to reinforce Nos. 271 and 274.

In a sign of the PLAN's desperation, the No. 389 boat had just undergone major shipyard repairs and was not yet certified for sea duty. Worse still, the South Sea Fleet's most capable frigates, the Type 065s, were unavailable owing

## PLAN ORDER OF BATTLE

No. 271 and No. 274	Class: <i>Kronshtadt</i> -class submarine chaser Displacement: 310 tons Armament: one 3.5-inch gun
No. 389 and No. 396	Class: Type 010 ocean minesweeper Displacement: 500 tons Armament: two 37 mm guns
No. 281 and No. 282	Class: Hainan-class submarine chaser Displacement: 500 tons Armament: two 3-inch guns

Source: John E. Moore, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1975–76* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1975).

## RVN NAVY ORDER OF BATTLE

HQ-5 and HQ-16	Class: <i>Barnegat</i> -class seaplane tender Displacement: 1,766 tons Armament: one 5-inch gun
HQ-4	Class: <i>Edsall</i> -class destroyer escort Displacement: 1,590 tons Armament: two 3-inch guns
HQ-10	Class: <i>Admirable</i> -class minesweeper Displacement: 650 tons Armament: one 3-inch gun

Source: Moore, *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1975–76*.

Island and Antelope Reef from the south toward Palm and Duncan Islands, while HQ-10 and HQ-16 cut across the central lagoon of the Crescent Group from the northwest. Sub chasers Nos. 271 and 274 were directed to monitor HQ-4 and HQ-5 while Nos. 396 and 389 shadowed HQ-10 and HQ-16. In a bid to break the stalemate, HQ-16 forced its way past the two Chinese ships and launched two rubber boats carrying commandos to land on Duncan and Palm Islands.<sup>18</sup> The Vietnamese assault forces ran right into the Chinese militia, which had dug in the day before. On Duncan Island, bayonet-wielding militiamen drove the commandos off the beach. On Palm Island, the defenders shot dead one Vietnamese and wounded three others, forcing the landing party to retreat to its mother ship. During the maneuver to land the commandos, HQ-16 rammed and damaged No. 389.<sup>19</sup>

Up to this point, the confrontation at sea had involved only maneuver, with no shots fired in anger. Chinese naval commanders, moreover, followed orders not to initiate the fight. Unable to dislodge their foes at sea and ashore, the RVN warships repositioned themselves into battle formation and charged the PLAN units. Bearing down on the Chinese vessels, they unleashed the initial salvo. The

to unspecified mechanical problems. Instead, the PLAN had to fall back on two Hainan-class sub chasers, Nos. 281 and 282, attached to a coastal garrison division in Shantou, nearly nine hundred kilometers from Hainan. The pair sped to Woody Island, refueling along the way in Zhanjiang and Yulin.

China's navy was clearly scrambling to assemble its forces. The Cultural Revolution was largely responsible for the fleet's state of disrepair. Nonetheless, the pieces were in place for confrontation. The hastily organized flotilla, four vessels in forward positions and two in the rear, were to protect the fishing boats and resupply the maritime militia on the islands.

## THE BATTLE

On the morning of 19 January, the South Vietnamese warships approached the Chinese flotilla from two directions. HQ-4 and HQ-5 circled around Money

Vietnamese directed their fire at the ships' bridges, killing No. 247's political commissar, Feng Songbai, on the spot.<sup>20</sup> After taking direct hits, minesweeper No. 389 caught fire and began to take on water.

The PLAN units immediately returned fire and surged toward the opponent's warships. The commanders received orders to "speed forward, fight close, and hit hard."<sup>21</sup> The smaller, faster, and nimbler Chinese vessels purposefully sought close combat (贴身战, literally, "stick-to-body combat") against the larger, lumbering, and slower-firing RVN units.<sup>22</sup> The tactic was to draw so near that the enemy's main deck guns would overshoot their targets. By fighting while sheltering in these blind spots, the Chinese effectively nullified the superior range and lethality of the enemy's firepower. The PLAN commanders chose a knife fight against an adversary expecting a gunfight.

The RVN vessels sought to keep their distance, but the Chinese ships quickly homed in from several thousand meters to hundreds of meters.<sup>23</sup> Sub chasers Nos. 271 and 274 concentrated their fire on HQ-4 while Nos. 396 and 389 attacked HQ-16. The PLAN units took aim at communication gear, radars, and command posts to blind and deafen the enemy. In the intense exchange of fire, HQ-4 started to fill with smoke.<sup>24</sup> To the north, Nos. 396 and 389 drove off HQ-16 after fierce fighting and then turned on HQ-10.<sup>25</sup> In the melee, HQ-10's magazine exploded from a direct hit. By this time, the combatants were tangling only tens of meters from each other. At such close range, No. 389's crew raked HQ-10's deck with small-arms fire, killing the ship's captain.<sup>26</sup>

HQ-16 retreated to the open sea after No. 396 turned back its attempts to reach HQ-10. Following some more exchanges of fire, HQ-4 and HQ-5 also left the scene, leaving behind the crippled HQ-10. In the meantime, No. 389 was in trouble. The badly mauled ship listed heavily and its crew could not extinguish the fire. Despite the risk of an explosion, trawlers Nos. 402 and 407 helped beach the heavily damaged minesweeper on Duncan Island. Sub chasers Nos. 281 and 282 arrived from Woody Island belatedly, at around noon, and attacked HQ-10 three times, sinking the ship just south of Antelope Reef.<sup>27</sup> HQ-16, HQ-4, and HQ-5 loitered to the west of the Crescent Group but did not attempt to reengage the PLAN units.<sup>28</sup>

The Chinese moved quickly to retake Vietnamese-occupied islands. They wanted to cement their victory at sea; the naval command also feared that the opponent might counterattack with reinforcements. The South Sea Fleet mobilized one frigate, five torpedo boats, and eight patrol boats for the follow-on operation. The amphibious assault fleet, organized into three transport flotillas, was ordered to send ashore three infantry companies (each numbering about one hundred), one amphibious reconnaissance team, and the armed militia, totaling five hundred troops. The first flotilla consisted of four patrol craft accompanied by

fishing boats Nos. 402 and 407, hauling one infantry company. Four patrol craft and minesweeper No. 396 formed the second flotilla, with one infantry company and one reconnaissance team on board. The single frigate doubled as the third flotilla and the command ship, carrying one infantry company.<sup>29</sup>

The first flotilla assembled before Robert Island on the morning of 20 January. The patrol boats shelled the island to suppress the defenders there. Three platoons embarked in rubber rafts and sampans conducted the amphibious assault, seizing the island in about ten minutes. Shortly thereafter, the patrol boats and the minesweeper of the second flotilla opened fire on Pattle Island. As PLA troops landed, some thirty Vietnamese retreated to the middle of the island, where they eventually surrendered. Among those captured were a major in the South Vietnamese army and an American liaison officer from the U.S. embassy in Saigon. By the time the PLAN turned to Money Island, the Chinese found that the RVN commandos had already abandoned their positions.<sup>30</sup>

When the fighting was over, it was clear who had won. The PLAN had sunk one minesweeper, damaged three warships, killed or wounded over a hundred Vietnamese officers and sailors, captured forty-eight soldiers, and seized three islands, bringing the entire Paracel archipelago under China's control. The RVN Navy put one Chinese minesweeper out of action, shot up three other warships, killed eighteen, and wounded sixty-seven others.<sup>31</sup>

### THE BATTLE'S AFTERMATH

Stung by the defeat, Saigon threatened to escalate. The South Vietnamese navy reportedly sent two destroyers to reinforce Da Nang and directed six warships to head toward the Paracels.<sup>32</sup> The RVN high command also alerted all ground, naval, and air forces to heighten readiness for war. President Nguyen Van Thieu, who arrived in Da Nang to oversee his forces personally, allegedly ordered the South Vietnamese air force to bomb Chinese positions on the Paracels—before rescinding the decision. At the same time, Saigon requested assistance from the U.S. Seventh Fleet, but to no avail.

The Chinese girded for a Vietnamese counterattack. The Military Affairs Commission (MAC) instructed the Guangzhou Military Region to supply the defenders holding the Paracels. Yulin naval base soon became a logistical hub, organizing substantial quantities of ammunition, weaponry, fuel, medicine, food, water, and other supplies for delivery. The MAC placed all forces on high alert and detached three Type 01 Chengdu-class guided-missile frigates from the East Sea Fleet to reinforce their comrades. Equipped with SY-1 subsonic antiship cruise missiles, the frigates packed the kind of punch that the South Sea Fleet lacked. Mao Zedong personally ordered the three ships to transit the Taiwan



Strait—the most direct route to the Paracels—despite concerns that Nationalist forces on Taiwan and the offshore islands might ambush the flotilla on its way south.<sup>33</sup> Mao's gamble paid off when the three frigates arrived safely after an uneventful, though nerve-racking, voyage.<sup>34</sup>

The South Sea Fleet also called into service Type 033 Romeo-class submarines, including 157, 158, and 159, based in Yulin.<sup>35</sup> On 20 January, submarine 157 undertook an unusual refueling mission after an oiler grounded on North Reef. After the sub topped off patrol craft near Woody Island, it returned to port.<sup>36</sup> Submarine 158 departed Yulin on 22 January to patrol the waters between Da Nang and Pattle Island. Attesting to Chinese anxieties about a Vietnamese riposte, its mission was to monitor enemy fleet movements and sink—without prior approval from high command—any RVN warships heading toward the Paracels.<sup>37</sup> Intriguingly, a PLAN sonarman later claimed that he had detected a U.S. nuclear-powered attack submarine that had been “tracking us for a long time.”<sup>38</sup> Submarine 159 subsequently took the place of submarine 158—under stricter rules of engagement, as fears of an RVN counterstrike receded.

This show of force, particularly the appearance of the missile-armed frigates, tipped the local naval balance of power around the Paracels in China's favor. Saigon soon realized that it was unable to reverse the new realities on the ground and eventually backed down.

After the dust had settled, the Chinese leadership began to consider steps for consolidating China's presence on the Paracels. In July 1974, the State Council and the MAC jointly issued a formal fortification plan. Beijing put Liu Huaqing, then the PLAN's deputy chief of staff, in charge of garrisoning the Paracels. Liu led a ten-member team to Woody Island for an on-site inspection in October 1974. The following month, Liu briefed the PLAN's leadership. Liu's findings would become the basis for constructing shore facilities, including an airfield and a port, and for administering the island garrison in subsequent years.<sup>39</sup>

## ASSESSMENT OF THE BATTLE

Recent Chinese publications have revealed, in vivid detail, a complex campaign that involved various implements of maritime power, ranging from trawlers to militia to submarines. Firsthand accounts make clear that it was not an easy win. Leaders had to be resourceful, improvising solutions along the way to make up for the decrepit material state of the PLAN. Chinese commanders committed their fair share of blunders even as they caught some big breaks. Friction bedeviled the Chinese navy. This more complete picture of the incident provides a sounder basis for evaluating the campaign and for assessing the lessons the Chinese may have learned from the battle.

*Primacy of Politics.* China's political leadership retained a firm grip on all aspects of the campaign.<sup>40</sup> Operational imperatives repeatedly gave way to larger strategic considerations. On the day the Vietnamese landed on Robert and Money Islands, Mao Zedong personally approved the initial decision to respond more forcefully.<sup>41</sup> He would maintain a watchful eye throughout the conflict. As the PLAN assembled its forces, the MAC stood up a six-member leading small group, headed by Marshal Ye Jianying and Deng Xiaoping to supervise the entire operation.<sup>42</sup> Working out of the Xishan Command Center under the General Staff Department, the group assumed direct operational control and reported directly to Chairman Mao and the Politburo. Ye and Deng set the parameters of the campaign and asserted their will at key junctures during the battle and its aftermath.

Uncertainties surrounding possible U.S. reactions to escalation in the Paracels may in part explain the close political oversight of the operation. On the one hand, the 1973 Paris Peace Accords and the subsequent withdrawal of all U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam had dramatically reduced America's stake in the fate of its client. The burden had shifted to Saigon to look after its own security. War weariness afflicted decision makers in Washington as well. Simultaneously, Sino-American ties were still basking in the afterglow of rapprochement in 1972. Both sides were eager to court each other's friendship to counterbalance the Soviet threat. China's tepid response to the U.S. mining of Haiphong following Hanoi's Easter offensive signaled that great-power interests had eclipsed those of the regional players. The crisis over the Paracels thus represented a golden opportunity to seize the islands while China's strategic value to the United States remained very high.

On the other hand, Saigon was still Washington's ally. Equally worrying to the Chinese, the United States had appeared tacitly to support its client's position throughout the American phase of the Vietnam War; U.S. reconnaissance flights over the Paracels in the 1960s had drawn numerous protests from China. A violent clash of arms was certain to draw Washington's unwanted attention. Moreover, any U.S. diplomatic or military support to the RVN almost certainly would have transformed the strategic landscape and the local balance of power. The imperative to keep the United States out, even if direct American involvement was deemed unlikely, probably shaped the conduct of operations.

Recent Chinese accounts suggest that decision makers in Beijing carefully weighed the risk of U.S. intervention during the crisis as they contemplated each move. According to Admiral Kong Zhaonian, then the deputy commander of the Chinese navy, the tactical principle of not firing the first shot in part reflected worries about third-party intervention.<sup>43</sup> By conceding the first tactical move to the RVN Navy—so went the logic—China could cast South Vietnam as the aggressor, thus complicating America's diplomatic position. The Chinese therefore



framed (and still regard) the engagement as a “counterattack in self-defense.” Conversely, evidence that China had drawn first blood might have given Washington a more tangible reason to back Saigon.

Such caution extended to the battle’s immediate aftermath. Buoyed by operational success, the South Sea Fleet’s commander, Zhang Yuanpei, ordered his warships to give chase and sink the fleeing enemy vessels; but the commander of the Guangzhou Military Region, Xu Shiyu, speaking for the MAC, countermanded Zhang’s directive.<sup>44</sup> Fears of horizontal escalation again stayed the PLAN’s hand.

Concerns about a hostile U.S. response also stimulated debate about evicting Vietnamese forces from Robert, Pattle, and Money Islands. Intelligence reports that U.S. Navy warships were headed to the Paracels from the Philippines further alarmed the leading small group.<sup>45</sup> While the PLAN was likely tempted to ride the momentum of victory at sea, such a seizure would represent a major escalation. Chinese leaders feared that Washington might interpret such a climb up the ladder as a threat to the prebattle status quo. Admiral Kong recalled that even though plans and forces were in place to conduct the island landings, local commanders held back until their political masters made up their minds. Members of the leading small group apparently agonized over the decision to put troops ashore. In the end, Ye Jianying and Deng Xiaoping adjudicated the debate and ordered the Guangzhou Military Region to go forward with the amphibious assault.<sup>46</sup>

The absence of outside intervention—due in no small part to tight political control of military operations—was crucial to the strategic success of the naval engagement.

*David vs. Goliath.* The battle exposed China’s military vulnerability to its south. Owing to Sino-Soviet and cross-strait tensions, Beijing’s strategic gaze was riveted to the north and east. Not surprisingly, the PLAN’s most capable ships belonged to the North Sea and East Sea Fleets. The South Sea Fleet’s feeble force structure reflected the South China Sea’s backwater status. As the crisis unfolded, the fleet had few seagoing forces suitable for operations in the Paracels, a predicament certainly made worse by the travails experienced during the Cultural Revolution. The frigate *Nanning*, a converted ex-Imperial Japanese Navy warship, was well past its service life. As noted, the three Type 065 frigates were not ready for sea duty. The PLAN’s fast-attack craft suffered from limited range and questionable seaworthiness. Only the submarine chasers and minesweepers possessed the range to sustain patrols that far south.

Chinese commentators frequently point to the unfavorable tactical situation confronting PLAN commanders on the eve of battle.<sup>47</sup> The RVN Navy clearly outsized and outgunned the PLAN: HQ-4 displaced nearly 1,600 tons at full load and was armed with two three-inch guns; HQ-5 and HQ-16 each displaced about

1,766 tons and were each equipped with a five-inch gun; HQ-10 displaced 650 tons and carried a three-inch gun. By contrast, the PLAN's *Kronshtadt*-class submarine chaser, Type 010 oceangoing minesweeper, and Hainan-class sub chaser displaced 310, 500, and 500 tons, respectively. All were armed with smaller-caliber guns than their Vietnamese counterparts. As one study notes, even the largest PLAN ship was smaller than the RVN's smallest vessel.<sup>48</sup>

Yet China's navy won. Chinese analysts credit the officers and sailors alike for their tactical skill and *élan*.<sup>49</sup> Such intangible qualities, in their eyes, more than made up for the PLAN's lack of heft and firepower. Indeed, the fighting spirit of No. 398's crew, which engaged in the equivalent of hand-to-hand combat against HQ-10, remains part of the Chinese navy's lore. That the PLAN overcame such material asymmetries certainly dovetailed with the service's long-standing small-ship ethos. From the founding of the People's Republic, the Chinese navy found itself struggling from a position of inferiority against the U.S.-backed Nationalist forces. Yet in the 1950s and 1960s the PLAN repeatedly bested its archrival at sea, employing speed, daring, and stratagems. To Chinese observers, the battle for the Paracels thus represents yet another example of how an enterprising and determined weaker side can beat the strong.

However, such a feel-good story is overly simplistic, if not misleading. The PLAN's success resulted as much from Vietnamese incompetence and mistakes as it did from Chinese tactical virtuosity.<sup>50</sup> For example, some Chinese analysts criticize the RVN Navy for dividing the flotilla during the initial approach on the morning of 19 January. Had the Vietnamese concentrated their forces and their fire—so goes this line of reasoning—they might have picked off PLAN warships in sequence.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the decision to charge Chinese positions was imprudent. Proximity played to the opponent's strengths while negating the RVN's advantages in range and firepower. Had the Vietnamese struck the Chinese from a greater distance (assuming the crews possessed the necessary gunnery skills), they might have avoided the close-in combat that so favored China's tactical preferences. In other words, a more capable and less cooperative opponent might have changed the battle's outcome. A false lesson thus lurks for the Chinese.

***Fog, Friction, and Chance.*** During this battle Carl von Clausewitz would have instantly recognized "the countless minor incidents" that "combine to lower the general level of performance."<sup>52</sup> The terribly timed mechanical failures of the Type 065 frigates—the South Sea Fleet's most suitable combatants for the mission—set back the PLAN just as tensions rose in the Paracels. Had the frigates been available and rushed to the scene, the battle might have tipped even more favorably toward China. Alternatively, their presence might have deterred the Vietnamese from attacking in the first place.<sup>53</sup>

However, the Chinese improvised, and managed—barely—to cobble together a flotilla in response to the RVN's naval presence. Even so, the PLAN was very fortunate that the weather cooperated. The operation took place during the northeast monsoon season, when surges—involving gusts of forty knots or more—can strike without much warning. Had nature turned against the PLA, the small combatants would have had trouble handling the rough seas, spelling trouble for the entire operation. The PLAN was as lucky as it was good.

Command-and-control problems plagued the Chinese. On the night of 17 January, reinforcements consisting of torpedo boats were on their way to the Paracels but were recalled because of overlapping chains of command. The PLAN's deputy commander had arranged for the short-legged craft to refuel at Woody Island before heading into the combat zone. Unaware of the plan, the Guangzhou Military Region's commander ordered the ships back to port, citing lack of fuel.<sup>54</sup> Had the torpedo boats been present when hostilities broke out, the PLAN might have won an even more decisive battle. Alternatively, the Vietnamese might have backed down instead of picking a fight.

The late arrival of sub chasers Nos. 281 and 282 was yet another instance of poor communications. On the night of 18 January, Wei Mingsen, the flotilla commander, had received intelligence that the Vietnamese planned to attack the next day. He thus requested that fleet headquarters dispatch Nos. 281 and 282, which were awaiting instructions at Woody Island, only three to four hours away. Yet it took the two ships more than twelve hours to arrive, well after the heaviest fighting had ended. A postbattle investigation revealed that the South Sea Fleet headquarters in Zhanjiang failed to follow proper communications protocol, thus contributing to the significant delay in relaying the deployment orders.<sup>55</sup> Had the ships reached the Paracels earlier, the confrontation might have unfolded quite differently.

The inability of the PLAN's land-based airpower, centered on the J-6 fighter, to conduct sustained combat air patrols exposed the Chinese flotilla to enemy airpower. South Vietnam's F-5 fighters similarly lacked the range to loiter over the Paracels for more than five to fifteen minutes. Some Chinese analysts believe that the appearance of the J-6s over the Paracels, even for a short time, boosted morale and produced a certain deterrent effect on the adversary.<sup>56</sup> But this assertion is difficult to test and verify. The Chinese were simply fortunate that the air was uncontested.

Chance favored the Chinese navy again when Mao ordered the East Sea Fleet to send reinforcements to the Paracels. Interfleet cooperation was rare, if not unheard of, with regional fleet autonomy the norm. It is unclear whether the lack of interoperability added to the friction. Intriguingly, Taiwan did not object to the

transit through the strait and made no moves to obstruct passage, even though it was well positioned to harass the PLAN warships.<sup>57</sup> The Chinese leadership, bracing for a possible Nationalist ambush, was puzzled and pleasantly surprised by this conspicuous inactivity.<sup>58</sup> Taiwan was clearly a complicating factor that could have, at the very least, delayed the arrival of the three frigates. Beijing's ability to maneuver forces along the maritime periphery depended on Taipei's acquiescence, if not goodwill. Perhaps leaders on both sides of the strait tacitly agreed that South Vietnam's position in the South China Sea needed to be overturned.

In another example of Clausewitzian fog and friction, a Chinese oiler piloted by a crew unfamiliar with local waters ran aground on a reef. The tanker was en route to replenish the assortment of fast-attack craft that had assembled to seize the Vietnamese-held islands on 20 January. The combatants, capable only of one-way trips to the combat zone, were desperately short on fuel. Fuel-storage facilities did not exist on Woody Island, so only the grounded oiler could have supplied the fuel in offshore waters. Apparently out of options, the South Sea Fleet ordered submarine 157 to step in as a substitute. After filling its ballast tanks with fuel, the boat sprinted to the Paracels at full speed on the surface, a particularly risky move in a time of hostilities. This hastily improvised and highly unorthodox method of delivering fuel worked, to the relief of Chinese naval commanders. Even so, this logistical failure left the PLAN's flotilla dangerously exposed to a vigorous Vietnamese counterattack. Had the enemy contested the seas, this glitch could well have cascaded into disaster for the Chinese navy.

*Paramilitary Instruments of Maritime Power.* The civil-military integration of China's maritime power, involving the militia and the fishing trawlers, contributed directly to operational success. The militia, stationed forward on Woody Island, acted on short notice. Akin to a rapid-response force, the militia slipped onto the Crescent Group's southeastern islands under the cover of night, preempting the Vietnamese. Indeed, the militia threw back RVN commandos attempting to seize the islands the next day. The ability to act quickly and effectively denied operational objectives to the enemy while likely buying time for regular troops to mobilize on the mainland. Finally, the militia took part in the seizure of Robert and Pattle Islands that helped to secure China's control of the entire archipelago.

At sea, trawlers Nos. 402 and 407 acted as first responders. Months before the battle, the fishing boats maintained initial presence in the Paracels while asserting claims to the islands by planting flags on them. The trawlers then sent early warning to headquarters ashore when RVN warships first arrived in the Paracels. The leaders on board also furnished tactical intelligence to the PLAN's local commanders at sea. The ships helped transfer the militia onto Duncan, Drummond, and Palm Islands the night before the battle and provided the means to conduct

landings on Vietnamese-held islands after the RVN warships fled the area. The fishing boats were pivotal in the rescue of crippled minesweeper No. 389.

A closer look at the institutional affiliation of Nos. 402 and 407 helps explain their active participation throughout the confrontation. The trawlers belonged to the South China Sea Aquatic Produce Company, an entity that had been operating in the Paracels since 1955.<sup>59</sup> The company, in turn, fell under the control of the Paracels, Spratlys, and Zhongsha Islands Authority, a county-level administrative organ of Guangdong's provincial government. The authority was responsible for exercising sovereignty and jurisdiction over the islands and surrounding waters. Established in 1959, it was abolished in 2012 to yield to the establishment of Sansha, a prefecture-level city on Woody Island that claimed administrative powers over all islands and features in the South China Sea.

The fisheries company and the vessels it operated were also institutionally linked to the militia. The militia came under the dual leadership of Hainan's military district and the Chinese Communist Party's Work Committee of the Paracels, Spratlys, and Zhongsha Islands. The aforementioned authority—responsible for the fishing company—and the work committee formed a combined agency that administered the South China Sea islands under China's control. It is thus not surprising that Nos. 402 and 407 coordinated so closely with their militia and PLA counterparts. The PLAN drew strength from interagency cooperation.

Wei Mingsen revealed that the fishing company's deputy director, Zhang Binglin, was on board No. 407 to supervise the trawlers personally. In fact, Zhang boarded Wei's ship to share intelligence about the Vietnamese prior to battle and organized the 18 January militia landings on the islands. According to Wei, Zhang was a demobilized PLA soldier who boasted of "rich combat experience."<sup>60</sup> Yang Gui, the captain of No. 407 and leader of the militia on board, also conferred with Wei in person to confirm the presence of HQ-16.<sup>61</sup> Yang has described the core of his fishermen as "first-rate militia."<sup>62</sup> Both Wei and Yang recalled that militia had ready access to grenades, high-powered rifles, and machine guns below decks.

In contrast to a naval presence that could have conveyed belligerence, the trawlers gave China a low-profile means to back up its territorial claims. Even though the fishing boats engaged in provocative behavior, the ambiguities surrounding their identity and purpose furnished plausible deniability to Chinese leaders. The ostensibly civilian character of the trawlers added ammunition to Beijing's diplomatic narrative that Saigon was the aggressor. Indeed, a U.S. intelligence report cited "Saigon's military response to the move of Chinese fishermen into the Crescent group" as the "key step in the escalation."<sup>63</sup> This interpretation conformed to the story that Beijing likely wanted to tell.

## HISTORY RHYMING?

Chinese behavior during the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident exhibits operational preferences that echo the 1974 Sino-Vietnamese clash in the Paracels. The more recent crisis began when a Philippine reconnaissance aircraft detected five Chinese fishing trawlers working near the shoal, located some two hundred kilometers west of Luzon Island. To investigate the activities taking place inside what the Philippines considers its exclusive economic zone, Manila dispatched the navy's flagship, BRP *Gregorio del Pilar* (a former U.S. Coast Guard cutter). The discovery of coral, clams, and sharks on board the Chinese boats set in motion an action-reaction cycle. As the Philippine Navy sought to stop the poachers from hauling home the illegal catch, two China Marine Surveillance vessels intervened, precluding further Philippine attempts to enforce the law. To ease tensions, Manila recalled the frigate and deployed a coast guard vessel in its place. Rather than reciprocate the gesture, Beijing turned up the pressure by sending the Fisheries Law Enforcement Command's newest ship, adding heft to the Chinese show of resolve.

With at least eight Chinese vessels facing off against a lone Philippine cutter, the balance of forces clearly favored Beijing. Moreover, in the event of escalation, China's civilian boats and paramilitary forces could count on the long reach of the PLAN's striking power. While Chinese warships largely stayed out of sight during the crisis, their presence just beyond the horizon likely influenced Manila's strategic calculus. Even so, the Philippines refused to back down, leading to a months-long stalemate at sea. To bring an end to the standoff and arrest further deterioration in bilateral ties, the United States brokered a behind-the-scenes deal in which both sides agreed to remove their ships from the area. But shortly after the mutual withdrawals, China sent back its maritime law enforcement ships and closed off access to the shoal. Since then, Beijing has maintained a presence there, retaining de facto control of the feature and surrounding waters.

Just as armed trawlers played an outsize role throughout the Paracels campaign, civilian and paramilitary vessels took part in the Scarborough Shoal incident. Chinese fishing boats triggered both crises by engaging in activities that, at least in the eyes of rival claimants, were illicit or provocative. Militia-crewed boats in 1974 and paramilitary ships in 2012 acted as China's first line of defense, helping to probe the intentions and capabilities of their opponents while asserting Beijing's claims. The noncombatant vessels enjoyed the protection of the PLAN even as they served as the eyes and ears of the Chinese navy. Such mutual support enabled China to evaluate the tactical circumstances; demonstrate resolve without militarizing the confrontation during the initial stages; calibrate the level of coercive pressure needed to compel the opponent's will; and, should deterrence fail, apply force.



The civilian character of the Chinese vessels constrained their rivals' navies. The South Vietnamese and Philippine navies were apparently loath to fire directly on lightly armed or unarmed civilian vessels, lest they risk major escalation or diplomatic fallout. The two services thus found themselves maneuvering and posturing in vain to expel the Chinese ships. Even as China's maritime presence imposed a stalemate, Beijing depicted its adversaries' naval actions as major provocations, opening the way for a more muscular show of force. Nonmilitary units also deprived outside powers, such as the United States, of adequate rationale to intervene, yet they were more than enough to signal resolve to the local actors.

In both cases, Beijing waited for the other side to cross a red line before taking action that decisively settled the dispute in its favor. China's maritime services sprang into action only after South Vietnam and the Philippines committed their navies to confront the Chinese. Whether Beijing consciously maneuvered its opponents into making the apparent first move or its rivals stumbled into that first move is unclear. This "second-mover advantage" presumably conferred on China the moral high ground to achieve more ambitious territorial objectives. As Thomas Christensen observes, "It often appears that Beijing is waiting for provocations by others to legitimize Chinese actions that will consolidate control over the islands that China has claimed for decades but not administered in the past."<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Christopher Yung and Patrick McNulty contend that "China may be engaging in a 'status quo plus' approach to maritime territorial dispute management, maintaining the status quo until a rival acts to advance its territorial claims, and then responding vigorously to leave its rival in a disadvantaged position."<sup>65</sup>

In both confrontations, the Chinese penchant for conceding the first move, at least as China perceived it, extended to tactical rules of engagement. In 1974, Chinese combatants were under strict orders not to fire the first shot. Demonstrating impressive discipline under duress, the PLAN unleashed its firepower only after the RVN Navy obligingly launched the initial salvo. While the 2012 standoff avoided a firefight, the burden was on the Philippines to evict the nonmilitary Chinese vessels through greater staying power or force. Beijing in essence dared Manila to punch first, confident in the knowledge that it would overwhelm the outgunned Philippine navy in retaliation. Manila wisely refused to take the bait. A similar dynamic is discernible in the ongoing Sino-Japanese tussle over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands. China Coast Guard vessels regularly intrude into or near the islands' territorial waters, perhaps in hopes of setting off an overreaction.

After Beijing forcibly ousted Saigon and nudged out Manila by way of third-party intervention, it built up overbearing power in the disputed areas that shut out the rival claimants. The combined military-civilian flotilla that appeared in force near the Paracels not only cemented China's operational gains but also



conferred permanence on the new status quo. Zhang Zhaozhong, a retired admiral and well-known talking head in Chinese media, memorably dubbed Beijing's postcrisis consolidation of its position around Scarborough a "cabbage strategy." The metaphor refers to the concentric layers of security—from the navy standing watch at the outermost ring to the maritime law enforcement ships and fishing boats patrolling along the inner rings—that surround the shoal. By hardening a new reality with physical presence, China sought to telegraph irreversibility to outside audiences.

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

The United States and its regional partners confront an increasingly competitive maritime environment. From a strictly material perspective, the Chinese navy today is incomparably more powerful than it was in 1974. A replay of a weak and unprepared China facing off against a better-armed local opponent is virtually inconceivable.

At the tactical level, the roles have reversed rather dramatically: the PLAN outguns many of its Asian neighbors, including Vietnam, by significant margins. Indeed, the South Sea Fleet is no longer the neglected, rickety fleet from four decades ago. It now commands a large share of the service's newest surface combatants and, significantly, its base in Hainan is home to nuclear attack and nuclear ballistic missile submarines.

Woody Island has evolved from a primitive outpost four decades ago to a staging area from which fighters and warships can be launched. Farther south, a group of newly created artificial islands boasts runways and port facilities that can accommodate PLA air and naval forces. Should a network of mutually supporting, well-defended bases emerge across the South China Sea, a permanent forward presence would add teeth to China's coercive leverage in maritime disputes.

Overall, China now possesses the military power to impose costs on the United States about which Chinese leaders in 1974 could have only dreamed. Modern Chinese destroyers, frigates, fast-attack craft, and submarines bristle with long-range antiship cruise missiles that can strike from standoff distances. Shore-based aircraft and truck-mounted cruise and ballistic missiles can reach deep into the South China Sea, furnishing the kinds of protective cover that naval units in 1974 sorely lacked.

Somewhat counterintuitively, a more powerful PLA could render unnecessary violent clashes like the Paracels battle. Instead, China may rely even more on its maritime law enforcement ships—the signature feature of China's maritime coercion in recent years—to assert its territorial claims while the Chinese navy backstops such noncombatant units from just over the horizon. The Scarborough Shoal incident and the ongoing face-off over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands

amply demonstrate this civil-military integration of maritime power. Greater conventional military means will thus further empower irregular forces to impose China's will on rival claimants. And, if all else fails, Beijing can still call on its navy to settle a dispute. That China—unlike its weaker rivals—has the option of climbing the escalation ladder only amplifies the intimidation factor. Indeed, the navy's lurking presence may induce an opponent to back down in a crisis, as it apparently did during the Scarborough confrontation.

Even as the PLAN bulks up on more-capable platforms, China's maritime paramilitary forces are growing and modernizing at a breathtaking pace. According to a 2015 Pentagon report, China is pursuing "the largest MLE [maritime law enforcement] modernization effort in Asia" and "China's MLE fleet . . . is likely to increase in size by 25 percent and is larger than that of all of the other claimants combined."<sup>66</sup> The Paracels battle illustrates that China's employment of paramilitary units at sea is by no means a new phenomenon. Moreover, the clash reveals a well-pedigreed institutional nexus between the military and the maritime militia. Decades-long adherence to People's War under Mao helped hone the kinds of doctrine, personnel, command-and-control, and administrative structures well suited to combining conventional and irregular means. Such creative uses of civilian and militia personnel date back centuries; there may be more continuity to current Chinese strategy in offshore disputes than is commonly acknowledged.<sup>67</sup> Washington and other, Asian capitals should recognize that the complex interplay of Chinese naval and nonmilitary instruments of sea power will likely be a permanent fixture in regional maritime disputes.

Hybrid warfare, to use today's parlance, is neither novel nor unique to China. Russia, too, resorted to the use of paramilitary troops to dismember parts of Ukraine while avoiding a wider conflict with the West. There is thus an underlying logic of strategy that transcends the peculiarities of China's way of warfare. The apparent efficacy of mixing unorthodox methods with traditional tools of war suggests that China may turn to this playbook again in future confrontations in the South China Sea. With a more formidable conventional military backing up China's large and growing paramilitary forces, hybrid warfare could become an even more attractive and effective option for Beijing in the coming years. The United States and other stakeholders in the region must be alert to this prospect.

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#### NOTES

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1. A fine exception is Taylor Fravel's account of the battle and an explanation for the outbreak of hostilities between China and South Vietnam. See M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders*,

- Secure Nation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 272–87. For a lively retelling of the battle, see Bill Hayton, *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2014), pp. 70–78.
2. For early standard accounts of the battle, see Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China's Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1982), pp. 268–69, and David G. Muller, *China as a Maritime Power* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1983), pp. 152–54.
  3. For discussion of the PLAN's operational history, see 杜景臣 [Du Jingchen], ed., 中国海军军人手册 [Handbook for Officers and Enlisted of the Chinese Navy] (Beijing: Haichao, 2012), pp. 7–16.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 609.
  5. For general accounts of the battle, see 王传友 胡延波 郭红彬 [Wang Chuanyou, Hu Yanbo, and Guo Hongbin], 海防安全论 [On Coastal Defense] (Beijing: Haiyang, 2007), pp. 86–88; 房功利 杨学军 相违 [Fang Gongli, Yang Xuejun, and Xiang Wei], 中国人民解放军海军60年 (1949–2009) [China People's Liberation Army Navy, 60 Years (1949–2009)] (Qingdao: Qingdao, 2009), pp. 204–206; and 李明春 吉国 [Li Mingchun and Ji Guo], 海洋强国梦 [Maritime Power Dream] (Beijing: Haiyang, 2014), pp. 114–18.
  6. The two South Vietnamese references used for this article are Kiem Do and Julie Kane, *Counterpart: A South Vietnamese Naval Officer's War* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998), and Ha Van Ngac, “The January 19, 1974, Naval Battle for the Paracels against the People's Republic of China Navy in the East Sea,” *HQHH Dallas*, 2015, [vnnavydallas.com/](http://vnnavydallas.com/). At the time of the battle, Captain Kiem was the deputy chief of staff for operations of the RVN Navy, the third-highest-ranking officer in the service, while Captain Ngac was commander of the task force involved in the Paracels battle.
  7. 石云生 [Shi Yunsheng], ed., 中国海军百科全书 [Encyclopedia of the Chinese Navy] (Beijing: Haichao, 1999), p. 1746.
  8. Bruce A. Elleman, “China's 1974 Naval Expedition to the Paracel Islands,” in *Naval Power and Expeditionary Warfare: Peripheral Campaigns and New Theatres of Naval Warfare*, ed. Bruce A. Elleman and S. C. M. Paine (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 143–44.
  9. South Vietnamese troops stationed in the Paracels may have been furnishing meteorological data to the United States.
  10. 李炳夫 [Li Bingfu], “西沙海战中的永兴岛钻探” [Drilling at Woody Island during the Paracels Battle], *China Petrochem*, no. 16 (August 2012), pp. 80–83. Li was a member of the oil-prospecting team on Woody Island. The team found no oil on the island.
  11. 郭富文 [Guo Fuwen], “那场英勇的海战” [That Heroic Sea Battle], *People's Navy*, 21 January 2014, p. 4.
  12. *Ibid.*
  13. Vietnamese accounts describe the trawlers as steel-hulled, armed civilian ships disguised as fishing boats. Kiem and Kane, *Counterpart*, p. 176; Ngac, “Battle for the Paracels,” pp. 46 and 57.
  14. The Vietnamese warships were all hand-me-downs from the U.S. Navy. HQ-16 was the former USS *Chincoteague*, a seaplane tender of World War II vintage; the destroyer HQ-4 was the ex-USS *Forster* destroyer escort; the frigate HQ-5 was another former U.S. Navy tender; and the fleet minesweeper HQ-10 was the ex-USS *Serene* minesweeper.
  15. 魏鸣森 [Wei Mingsen], “我是怎么指挥西沙海战的” [How I Commanded the Paracels Sea Battle], *Modern Ships*, no. 8 (2007), p. 26. Wei Mingsen assumed command of the flotilla and deployed to the front lines on board No. 271, the flagship of the task force.
  16. “海军司令员谈西沙海战” [Navy Commander Discusses Paracels Battle], *Modern Ships*, no. 1A (2008), p. 16. This article is based on an interview with Adm. Kong Zhaonian, the deputy commander of the PLAN during the Paracels battle, who recounts key aspects of the clash.
  17. Du Jingchen, *Handbook for Officers and Enlisted*, p. 610.
  18. 杨贵华 [Yang Guihua], ed., 中国人民解放军战史教程 [Chinese People's Liberation Army War History Course] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), p. 233. According to Captain Kiem and Captain Ngac, HQ-5 launched the amphibious assault team to land on Duncan Island. Kiem and Kane,

- Counterpart*, p. 176; Ngac, "Battle for the Paracels," p. 54.
19. The ramming is reported in Shi Yunsheng, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Navy*, p. 1747. Another account reports that it was HQ-5 that rammed Nos. 396 and 389. See 梁芳 [Liang Fang], ed., 海战史与未来海战研究 [Sea Battle History and Research on Future Sea Battles] (Beijing: Haiyang, 2007), p. 199.
  20. Guo Fuwen, "That Heroic Sea Battle," p. 4.
  21. 杜作义 张云卿 [Du Zuoyi and Zhang Yunqing], "维护海洋权益 痛歼入侵之敌" [Defending Maritime Rights, Annihilating Invading Enemy], *Journal of Political Work*, no. 7 (1994), p. 17. *Journal of Political Work* is a monthly periodical published through the Dalian Naval Academy on behalf of the PLAN's Political Department. Du was No. 389's navigator, while Zhang was the political commissar on board No. 271.
  22. 李兆心 [Li Zhaoxin], "我所经历的西沙海战" [What I Experienced during the Paracels Sea Battle], *Party History Collection*, no. 7 (2009), p. 35. Li was a cryptographer working in the intelligence section of the South Sea Fleet headquarters.
  23. Wei Mingsen recounts that No. 271 was two thousand meters away from the Vietnamese when the shooting started. The Chinese then closed to a distance of tens of meters. See Wei Mingsen, "How I Commanded the Paracels Sea Battle," p. 30. The PLAN's handbook reports that the two sides closed from a range of one thousand meters to three hundred meters. See Du Jingchen, *Handbook for Officers and Enlisted*, p. 610.
  24. Captain Ngac corroborates the damage to HQ-4. See Ngac, "Battle for the Paracels," p. 60.
  25. Accounts about No. 389's actions vary substantially. Du Zuoyi and Zhang Yunqing recall that Nos. 396 and 389 turned their guns on HQ-10 after suppressing HQ-16's gunfire. See Du Zuoyi and Zhang Yunqing, "Defending Maritime Rights, Annihilating Invading Enemy," p. 17. Similarly, Wei Mingsen saw Nos. 396 and 389 fire into HQ-10 after driving off HQ-16. See Wei Mingsen, "How I Commanded the Paracels Sea Battle," p. 31. Others contend that HQ-10 charged minesweeper No. 389 to relieve HQ-16, then under heavy attack from Nos. 396 and 389. In this version of events, HQ-10 is hit while trying to save HQ-16. See Liang Fang, *Sea Battle History and Research on Future Sea Battles*, p. 199. According to the PLAN's official encyclopedia, it was No. 389 that charged HQ-10. The account in *People's Navy* corroborates the encyclopedia. See Shi Yunsheng, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Navy*, p. 1747, and Guo Fuwen, "That Heroic Sea Battle," p. 4.
  26. Du Zuoyi and Zhang Yunqing, "Defending Maritime Rights, Annihilating Invading Enemy," p. 17; Guo Fuwen, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Navy*, p. 4.
  27. Captain Kiem claims that an antiship cruise missile sank HQ-10, while Captain Ngac reports that he sighted a Komar-class guided-missile boat. Ngac likely mistook the arriving sub chaser reinforcement for the missile boat. Kiem and Kane, *Counterpart*, p. 178; Ngac, "Battle for the Paracels," pp. 63 and 72.
  28. Guo Fuwen, *Encyclopedia of the Chinese Navy*, p. 4.
  29. 刘礼峰 丁伟 [Liu Lifeng and Ding Wei], "西沙自卫反击作战 终极解密" [Paracels Self-defense Counterattack Operations Decoded], *Military History*, no. 6 (2005), p. 13.
  30. Ibid.
  31. Liang Fang, *Sea Battle History and Research on Future Sea Battles*, p. 200. Kiem contends that the RVN Navy sank a Chinese torpedo boat and a trawler, while Ngac claims that his forces sank No. 271. Kiem and Kane, *Counterpart*, p. 178; Ngac, "Battle for the Paracels," p. 70.
  32. Captain Ngac reports that he was put in charge of a new task force, composed of HQ-5, HQ-6, and HQ-17, to retake the Paracels. Owing to concerns that the warships were inadequate to fulfill the mission, the plan was subsequently canceled. Ngac, "Battle for the Paracels," p. 77.
  33. 张伟 [Zhang Wei], "毛泽东一生中决策的最后一仗—西沙群岛保卫战" [Mao Zedong's Strategic Decisions in the Last Battle: Defensive Battle for the Paracel Islands], *Party History Collection*, no. 10 (2008), p. 41. Chinese naval vessels typically avoided the Taiwan Strait, preferring to detour around Taiwan's east coast to reach the South China Sea.
  34. For an account of the tense passage through the Taiwan Strait, see 李兆新 [Li Zhaoxin],

- “西沙海战中我支援军舰顺利通过台湾海峡的真实过程” [The Real Story behind Our Warships Successfully Passing through the Taiwan Strait during the Paracels Battle], *Party History Collection*, no. 10 (2010), pp. 46–48. Li was on duty during the passage of the three frigates, witnessing the entire course of events.
35. The submarines were part of the 32nd Submarine Flotilla.
  36. See an oral account by 杨宝林 [Yang Baolin] recorded in 林儒生 [Lin Rusheng], “西沙海战中的潜艇兵” [A Submariner during the Paracels Battle], *Ordnance Knowledge*, no. 11 (2014), pp. 76–79. Yang was an electrician on board 159. Yang later became the political commissar of submarine 296.
  37. Captain Ngac recounts his fears that Romeo- and Whiskey-class submarines might be lurking along the route between Da Nang and the Paracels. In hindsight, his concerns appear justified. Ngac, “Battle for the Paracels,” p. 64.
  38. See oral accounts by crew members on board submarine 158 in 林儒生 [Lin Rusheng], “西沙海战中的潜艇预伏战” [Submarine Patrols during the Paracels Battle], *Ordnance Knowledge*, no. 4 (2015), p. 81.
  39. 刘华清 [Liu Huaqing], 刘华清回忆录 [Memoirs of Liu Huaqing] (Beijing: Liberation Army Press, 2007), pp. 338–43.
  40. For accounts of the Military Affairs Commission's directives to naval forces in the Paracels, see 高新生 [Gao Xinsheng], 中国共产党领导集体—海防思想研究 (1949–2009) [Study of Coastal Defense Thought of the Chinese Communist Party's Leading Group (1949–2009)] (Beijing: Shishi, 2010), pp. 171–74, and 吴寒月 [Wu Hanyue], 中国共产党海防思想研究 [Study of Coastal Defense Thought of the Chinese Communist Party] (Beijing: National Defense Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 126–28.
  41. Zhang Wei, “Mao Zedong's Strategic Decisions in the Last Battle,” p. 39.
  42. Ye Jianying, then vice chairman of the Party Central Committee and a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, managed the day-to-day affairs of the Military Affairs Commission. Zhou Enlai put Ye in charge of the leading small group. See 范硕 [Fan Shuo], ed., 叶剑英传 [Biography of Ye Jianying] (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 2015), p. 378. See also 宋毅军 [Song Yijun], “邓小平和叶剑英在1974年西沙自卫反击战前后” [Deng Xiaoping and Ye Jianying during the 1974 Paracels Self-defense Counterattack], *Party History Collection*, no. 7 (2014), p. 11.
  43. “Navy Commander Discusses Paracels Battle,” p. 15.
  44. Li Zhaoxin, “Real Story behind Our Warships Successfully Passing through the Taiwan Strait,” p. 33.
  45. Ye Jianying's biography corroborates this piece of intelligence. See Fan Shuo, *Biography of Ye Jianying*, p. 378. See also 赵小平 [Zhao Xiaoping], “叶剑英指挥西沙海战” [Ye Jianying Commands the Paracels Battle], *Modern Navy*, no. 6 (2000), p. 16.
  46. Zhao Xiaoping, “Ye Jianying Commands the Paracels Battle,” p. 16.
  47. For an assessment of the orders of battle on both sides, see 远林 唐毓璠 [Yuan Lin and Tang Yujin], “图说西沙海战” [Paracels Sea Battle Explained], *Modern Ships*, no. 10 (2001), pp. 35–37.
  48. Liang Fang, *Sea Battle History and Research on Future Sea Battles*, p. 199.
  49. The PLAN's tactical performance is especially noteworthy given the ravages of the Cultural Revolution. Two factors may have accounted for China's success. By 1974, the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution were over. Nationalism may have also sustained morale and the physical courage to fight.
  50. Vietnamese sources indicate that the RVN task force suffered major tactical and technical problems. HQ-10 was running on only one engine when the fighting started. See Kiem and Kane, *Counterpart*, p. 177, and Ngac, “Battle for the Paracels,” p. 40. HQ-4's main guns malfunctioned during the first critical minutes of the battle. See Kiem and Kane, *Counterpart*, p. 177, and Ngac, “Battle for the Paracels,” pp. 59 and 76. In the confusion of the skirmish, HQ-16 was struck by friendly fire. See Kiem and Kane, *Counterpart*, p. 178, and Ngac, “Battle for the Paracels,” p. 76. Finally, the RVN Air Force's F-5 fighters did not possess sufficient range to provide adequate cover to the naval units. See Kiem and Kane, *Counterpart*, p. 176, and Ngac, “Battle for the Paracels,” p. 61.



51. 刘振华 [Liu Zhenhua], “西沙海战胜利原因分析及对当前南海争端的启示” [Analysis of the Reasons behind the Victory in the Paracels Battle and Lessons for the Current South China Sea Disputes], *Legal System and Society*, no. 9 (2009), p. 367.
52. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 119.
53. For this counterfactual analysis, see 镭射 [Lei She], “如果65型护卫舰参加西沙海战” [If the Type 65 Frigate Had Joined the Paracels Sea Battle], *Modern Ships*, no. 11 (2012), p. 3.
54. Interview with Adm. Kong Zhaonian, “Navy Commander Discusses Paracels Battle,” p. 15.
55. 张毓清 [Zhang Yuqing], “亲历西沙之战” [Witness to the Paracels Battle], *History*, no. 7 (2011), p. 69. Zhang was the navigator of No. 281. According to Zhang, when No. 281 arrived at Woody Island, its crew shut off its radio and transferred communication links to facilities ashore, in line with protocol. But, for some reason, the South Sea Fleet headquarters kept radioing No. 281. According to standard practice, the fleet headquarters should have contacted shore command instead. Rear Admiral Zhang later served as commander of the training department of PLAN headquarters and as a department chair at China's National Defense University.
56. 尹恩忠 李楠 [Yin Enzhong and Li Nan], “西沙海战中思想政治工作的经验及启示” [The Experience and Lessons of Political Work during the Paracels Sea Battle], *Journal of Political Work*, no. 7 (2014), p. 34.
57. Theories abound about Taiwan's apparent passivity. Some believe Chiang Kai-shek, who shared the People's Republic's claims over the South China Sea, tacitly allowed the Chinese frigates to pass unmolested. Others speculate that back-channel communications won Chiang's approval of the transit. See 张春英 [Zhang Chunying], “海峡两岸对南沙和西沙群岛主权的共同维护” [Cross-strait Joint Protection of Spratly and Paracel Islands Sovereignty], *Military History*, no. 5 (2003), p. 27.
58. Li Zhaoxin, “Real Story behind Our Warships Successfully Passing through the Taiwan Strait,” p. 47.
59. The company was first established in Guangzhou in 1954 and moved to the town of Baimajing in Hainan in 1958. Formerly known as the State-Owned South China Sea Guano Company, the company mined guano on Woody Island from 1955 to 1962. After the company exhausted the guano supplies on the island in 1962, it was renamed the State-Owned South China Sea Aquatic Produce Company. Today, the South China Sea Fishing Industry Group is a major conglomerate. The web page summarizing its corporate history extols the contributions of No. 407 in the Paracels battle. The PLA conferred awards on nearly a hundred militia members employed by the company for their meritorious service. Images of No. 407, No. 402, and Yang Gui, the captain of No. 407, are available on the website. See [www.nanhaifishery.com](http://www.nanhaifishery.com).
60. Wei Mingsen, “How I Commanded the Paracels Sea Battle,” p. 27.
61. 黄传友 舟欲行 [Huang Chuanyou and Zhou Yuhang], 海军—征战纪实 [Navy: Campaign Documentary] (Beijing: Liberation Army Literary Press, 2007), p. 328; 舒云 [Shu Yun], “西沙群岛自卫反击战内幕” [The Inside Story of the Paracel Islands Self-defense Counterattack], *Party History*, no. 10 (2000), p. 11.
62. 郑小红 杨少松 [Zheng Xiaohong and Yang Shaosong], “八旬老船长忆中越西沙海战: 冒险援救受伤战” [Eighty-Year-Old Captain Remembers the Sino-Vietnamese Paracels Sea Battle: Taking Risks to Save Wounded Warriors], *China News Online*, 18 January 2010, [china.com/](http://china.com/).
63. Central Intelligence Agency, “The Paracel Islands Incident,” memorandum, 21 January 1974, p. 3. Available from the *Digital National Security Archive*, [www.search.proquest.com/dnsa](http://www.search.proquest.com/dnsa).
64. Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), p. 261.
65. Christopher D. Yung and Patrick McNulty, “An Empirical Analysis of Claimant Tactics in the South China Sea,” *Strategic Forum*, no. 249 (August 2015), p. 10.
66. U.S. Department of Defense, *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, July 2015), p. 11.
67. See Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, pp. 216–23.

## WHO'S AT THE HELM?

### The Past, Present, and Future Leaders of China's Navy

*Jeffrey Becker*

China's navy is undergoing a leadership transition not seen in a generation. Between late 2014 and the time of this writing (spring 2015), the upper echelons of leadership within the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy, or PLAN) began experiencing substantial change in personnel, with eleven of the fourteen positions on the navy's Party Committee Standing Committee (referred to below as the PLAN Standing Committee)—the navy's highest decision-making body—turning over (see table 1).<sup>1</sup>

Many of these new leaders have been promoted from one of China's three fleets: the North Sea Fleet (NSF), East Sea Fleet (ESF), or South Sea Fleet (SSF). In 2014, for example, Vice Admirals Tian Zhong and Jiang Weilie, former NSF and SSF commanders, respectively, both became PLAN deputy commanders, a position that carries with it a seat on the PLAN Standing Committee.

Tian and Jiang typify the PLAN's Rising Cohort.

Born in the mid-1950s, these two officers came of age in a navy that was just beginning to reform. Since then, they have gained direct experience with the navy's new missions, including far-seas operations. They are increasingly at ease conducting international naval diplomacy. Vice Admirals Tian and Zhong have led PLA delegations abroad, Vice Admiral Tian to Russia, North Korea, and South Korea and Vice Admiral Jiang to the United States.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, Vice Admiral Jiang served as the PLA's highest-ranking officer in attendance during China's first-ever participation in the U.S.-led Rim

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of the Pacific naval exercise (RIMPAC 2014).<sup>3</sup> Other officers newly promoted to the PLAN Standing Committee have similar experiences and qualities. Vice Admiral Qiu Yanpeng, a former ESF deputy commander, is a model officer for China's far-seas expeditionary navy, having led one of the PLAN's Gulf of Aden escort missions, training missions near the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands, and multiple exercises with foreign navies.<sup>4</sup>

More changes are on the horizon. Before the Third Plenum of the Eighteenth Party Congress in October 2012, rumors circulated of PLAN commander

**TABLE 1**  
**CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE PLAN STANDING COMMITTEE**

Name	Position	First Year on PLAN Standing Committee	Former Positions of New Members
Adm. Wu Shengli	PLAN Commander	2006	
Lt. Gen. Miao Hua	PLAN Political Commissar	2014	Political Commissar, Lanzhou Military Region
Vice Adm. Wang Dengping	PLAN Deputy Political Commissar	2014	Director, PLAN Political Department
Vice Adm. Ding Haichun	PLAN Deputy Political Commissar	2014	Political Commissar, East Sea Fleet
Vice Adm. Tian Zhong	PLAN Deputy Commander	2014	Commander, North Sea Fleet
Vice Adm. Jiang Weilie	PLAN Deputy Commander	2014	Commander, South Sea Fleet
Vice Adm. Liu Yi	PLAN Deputy Commander	2011–12	
Vice Adm. Ding Yi	PLAN Deputy Commander	2014	Deputy Commander, North Sea Fleet
Vice Adm. Du Jingchen	PLAN Deputy Commander	2011	PLAN Chief of Staff
Vice Adm. Wang Hai	PLAN Deputy Commander	2015	North Sea Fleet Chief of Staff
Vice Adm. Qiu Yanpeng	PLAN Chief of Staff	2014	Deputy Commander, East Sea Fleet
Rear Adm. Yang Shiguang	Director, PLAN Political Department	2014	Director, Political Department, East Sea Fleet
Rear Adm. Xu Weibing	Director, PLAN Logistics Department	2011	
Rear Adm. Wang Jianguo	Director, PLAN Equipment Department	2014	Deputy Director, PLAN Equipment Department

Admiral Wu Shengli's retirement.<sup>5</sup> Although this did not come to pass, he is already the oldest member of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the highest decision-making body within China's military.<sup>6</sup> As a CMC member, Admiral Wu has no known formal retirement date. However, past practice suggests he will step down no later than the Nineteenth Party Congress, scheduled for 2017, when he would be seventy-two.

These changes raise a number of questions for those interested in China's naval modernization. How do China's new navy leaders compare with their fellow senior officers, and how will they affect the PLAN's ongoing modernization efforts? The PLA Navy's transition from a coastal-defense force to a blue-water navy has garnered significant attention in both policy and academic circles.<sup>7</sup> However, an examination of the individuals overseeing the PLAN's transition largely has been missing from this discussion. This article seeks to fill that void through an examination of the PLAN's current leadership transition.

### CHINA'S NAVY LEADERSHIP IN TRANSITION

To do so, the article examines three groups of officers. The first is the PLA Navy's Old Guard: leaders who joined the PLA in the late 1960s and came of age largely during the Cultural Revolution, one of the most tumultuous and chaotic periods in modern Chinese history. These officers, however, are rapidly retiring, and are being replaced by the second group examined here, the PLAN's Rising Cohort. This cohort consists of officers who joined the PLA largely in the mid-1970s to early 1980s and came of age when the PLA was just beginning to transition from a coastal-defense force to a blue-water navy. Naval officers who have recently transitioned into leadership positions, including those described above, are members of this group. Members of the third group constitute the PLAN's Future Leadership. These officers joined the PLA in the late 1980s and early 1990s and came of age during years of rapid economic growth and development. Although they have not yet ascended to leadership positions, the PLAN's next leadership core is likely to be selected from this cohort.

This is a watershed moment for China's navy leadership. The reforms of the past two decades have been led by a generation of leaders who, while extraordinary in many ways, had little opportunity to experience the types of operations they were tasked with readying the PLAN to undertake. They came of age in a PLA that was ideologically oriented, internally focused, and concerned with coastal defense. However, they have successfully overseen the development of an increasingly professional, modern, and international navy. Their successors, members of the Rising Cohort, have played an important and hands-on role in the PLAN's modernization program and led many of China's early blue-water operations, including historic global circumnavigations, training missions into

the western Pacific, and early anti-piracy escort operations in the Gulf of Aden. Thus, for the first time in modern history, China's navy will be led by officers for whom at-sea and blue-water experience is the norm rather than the exception.

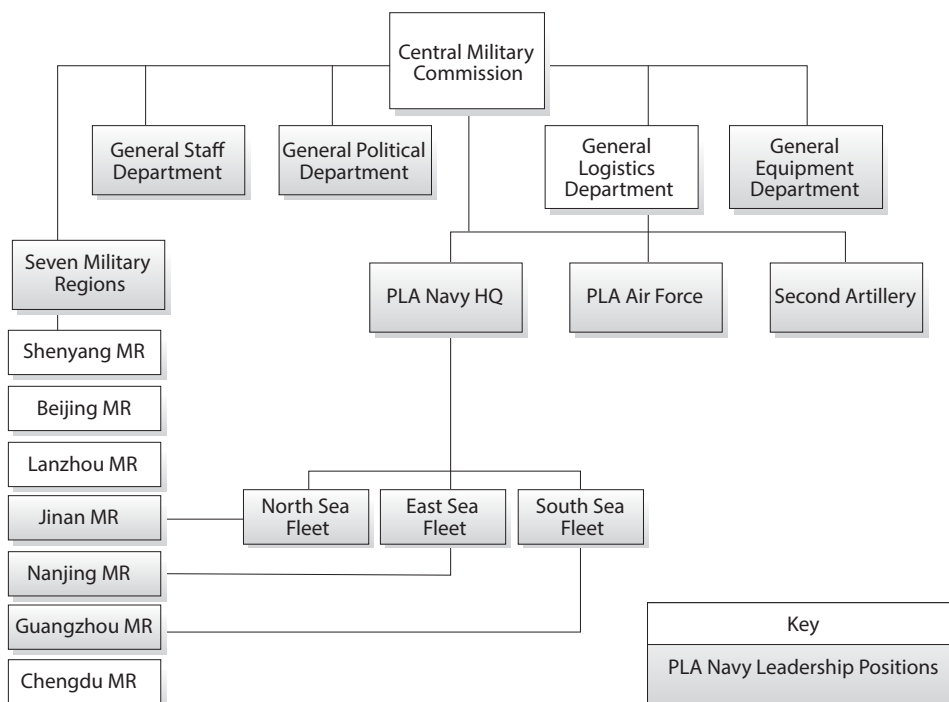
Following on their heels is the PLAN's Future Leadership, the first cohort of officers to join a Chinese navy that had already established a professional military education system and begun taking on more-expansive roles and missions before they joined. Not only do officers of this cohort have experience with blue-water operations, but they have experience operating in concert with foreign navies in combined military exercises and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) missions. Their eventual promotion into leadership positions will likely create a second watershed moment for the PLAN, for the service will then be led by officers experienced in not only engaging but operating with foreign navies, enabling them to incorporate many of the international best practices learned from these experiences.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. After a brief examination of PLAN leadership in historical and organizational perspective, the article compares and contrasts the retiring Old Guard with the Rising Cohort, focusing primarily on changes within the PLAN Standing Committee. It then provides a comparative analysis of all three cohorts. The paper concludes by examining implications of this leadership transition for the PLAN and the PLA more broadly.

## PLA NAVY LEADERSHIP IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

PLAN leaders have historically carried little weight in the Chinese military or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) hierarchy. Early navy leaders were simply ground force officers and Party personnel transferred from elsewhere. The PLA Navy's first commander, Xiao Jingguang, spent his early military career in Guangdong, Wuhan, and Changsha. After Mao selected him to head the navy, there was still significant debate whether the navy would be an independent service or housed within the General Staff Department.<sup>8</sup> It was not until 1988, when career submariner Zhang Lianzhong was promoted to commander, that the PLAN was led by a career naval officer.<sup>9</sup> The PLAN's first career-navy political commissar did not come until the promotion of Zhou Kunren in 1993. In 2004, for the first time in the reform era, the PLA institutionalized the practice of having the commanders of each of the three nonground services (the PLAN, the PLA Air Force, and the Second Artillery) serve concurrently in the CMC, thus increasing the influence of these services in relation to the traditionally dominant ground forces.<sup>10</sup> Yet only recently were PLAN officers serving in military positions outside the navy allowed to wear their navy uniforms rather than the olive green of the ground forces.<sup>11</sup>

## PLAN LEADERS THROUGHOUT THE PLA



Source: Adapted from Becker, Liebenberg, and Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope*, p. 15.

From these humble beginnings, PLA Navy leaders appear to have gained considerable influence within the PLA over the past decade (see the figure). Detailed information on budgetary spending by service remains unavailable, but it is clear the PLA has made naval modernization a high priority, with acquisitions from abroad and construction of new ships and weapons platforms.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, the PLA remains ground force-centric, but navy officers are now found in all levels of China's military and hold positions of great importance within the larger PLA hierarchy.

### HOW CHINA'S NAVY LEADERSHIP IS ORGANIZED

PLAN leaders hold important positions within the PLA's four general departments: the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Logistics Department (GLD), and General Equipment Department (GED). These four organizations are tasked with coordinating and overseeing work within their specific purviews throughout the PLA. The GSD is responsible for planning, organizing, and directing military operations, and leads the PLA's modernization program. The GPD manages the political relationship between the CCP and the PLA, and ensures the Party controls the armed forces. The

GLD oversees logistics work. The GED, also referred to as the General Armament Department, oversees weapons and equipment development and maintenance.

This four-department structure is mirrored in China's navy: the PLAN has a headquarters department, which serves a function similar to the GSD's, as well as political, logistics, and equipment departments. Many lower-level departments (*erjibu*, 二级部) found in the PLA's four general departments are also replicated within the PLAN. For example, the GSD Military Affairs Department is responsible PLA-wide for promulgating manuals and developing policies related to PLA career tracks; the navy's Military Affairs Department at PLAN headquarters has similar responsibilities within the PLAN.<sup>13</sup>

Of China's seven military regions (MRs), PLAN leaders serve in three (the Jinan, Nanjing, and Guangzhou MRs), and in China's three fleets, which are bureaucratically subordinate to the three respective MRs, with the commander of the fleet serving as deputy commander within that MR.

Most navy leaders are found at PLAN headquarters, or within the headquarters of one of the three fleets. However, PLAN personnel are increasingly holding positions of importance in central-level organizations and the MRs. Admiral Sun Jianguo, for example, is one of five deputy chiefs of the PLA General Staff, and chair of the China Institute for International Strategic Studies, a think tank for the Second Department of the PLA General Staff Department, the organ responsible for human intelligence gathering and analysis.<sup>14</sup> Vice Admiral Liu Zhuoming, son of the 1980s naval reformer Admiral Liu Huaqing, serves as the deputy director of the General Equipment Department's Science and Technology Commission, a body responsible for overseeing high-priority defense science and technology aspects of the PLA's modernization program.<sup>15</sup> Rear Admiral Guan Youfei is the director of the Ministry of National Defense Foreign Affairs Office, the primary organization that manages China's foreign military relations, while Rear Admiral Li Ji serves as one of his deputy directors.<sup>16</sup> Other PLAN officers serve as heads of navy departments or joint logistics departments within the MRs, maintaining force readiness and overseeing naval military training.

## DEFINING PLA NAVY LEADERSHIP

There exists no universally accepted definition of what constitutes a leadership position within the PLA Navy. The few discussions of PLAN leadership that exist focus almost exclusively on the PLAN commander, at most extending to a few members of the PLAN Standing Committee.<sup>17</sup> However, such a limited scope of discussion leaves out many officers with influence over day-to-day operations and over the PLAN's long-term strategic direction. With this in mind, this article substantially expands the discussion of PLAN leadership to encompass the following positions:

- PLAN headquarters
  - The PLA Navy commander and political commissar
  - PLA Navy deputy commanders and deputy political commissars
  - The PLA Navy chief of staff and deputy chiefs of staff
  - The directors, political commissars, and deputy directors of the navy's political, logistics, and equipment departments
  - The directors of second-level departments
- China's three fleets
  - Fleet commanders and political commissars
  - Fleet deputy commanders
  - Fleet chiefs of staff and deputy chiefs of staff
  - Directors of the fleet political, logistics, and equipment departments
- The four PLA general departments
  - Naval officers serving as deputy chiefs of the general staff
  - Naval officers serving as assistants to the director of a general department
  - Naval officers serving as directors or deputy directors of PLA first-level departments
- The military regions
  - Naval officers serving as MR deputy chiefs of staff
  - Naval officers serving as deputy directors of MR logistics departments
  - Naval officers serving as directors of MR navy departments

Definitions of PLAN "leadership" will remain subject to debate. However, the positions listed above all entail extensive responsibilities for portfolios that provide their incumbents with immediate PLAN-wide or fleet-wide influence. Focusing on these positions, this article relies on a data set of profiles of eighty-eight different PLAN officers serving in these positions.

### A YOUNGER PLAN LEADERSHIP

Before 2014, one of the most striking qualities of PLA Navy leaders was their advanced age. Almost every PLAN Standing Committee member had begun his military career in the late 1960s or early 1970s and had come of age during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), when China experienced what amounted to a low-intensity civil war.<sup>18</sup> In 2013, seven of the thirteen PLAN Standing Committee members had joined the PLA between 1964 and 1969, while four joined

**TABLE 2**  
**AVERAGE AGES OF SELECT PLA NAVY AND U.S. OFFICERS**

PLA Navy Officers		U.S. Navy Officers	
Admiral/General	64	Admiral	57
Vice Admiral	61	Vice Admiral	56
Rear Admiral	58	Rear Admiral	55
Senior Captain	52		

between 1970 and 1972. Only Logistics Department director Xu Weibing was younger, having joined the PLA in 1978.<sup>19</sup>

PLAN leaders were also considerably older than their foreign counterparts. For example, in

2013 the average age for the eleven serving U.S. Navy admirals (O-10) was fifty-seven, compared with an average age of sixty-four for the three PLA Navy officers of comparable rank.<sup>20</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, born in 1945, was eight years older than his USN counterpart at the time, Admiral Greenert.<sup>21</sup> To put this in perspective, Admiral Wu's continued tenure as PLAN commander would be roughly equivalent to the U.S. Navy being led by an officer whose formative experiences came during the middle period (1965–69) of the Vietnam War.

Recent changes have injected younger blood into the PLAN Standing Committee. In early 2014, immediately before the most recent round of personnel changes, the average age of this body's members was sixty-two; today it is fifty-eight.<sup>22</sup> Only two actively serving members, Admiral Wu and Vice Admiral Du Jingchen, joined the PLA in the 1960s (see table 3).

Moreover, fewer senior PLAN officers are remaining on active duty past the age at which retirement is mandated, which provides opportunities for younger officers to move up the ranks. Since the 1990s, the PLA has worked to normalize retirement ages for high-level officers, and roughly two-thirds of the officers examined herein joined the PLA between 1970 and 1980.<sup>23</sup> This appears to be true across the PLA. For example, after examining the careers of 107 PLA commanders and deputy commanders serving since 2005 in the army, navy, and air force, we found only seven officers within this group who had remained on active service past their respective retirement ages.<sup>24</sup>

#### CHINA'S EAST COAST: THE CRADLE OF PLA NAVY LEADERSHIP

Studies of civilian and military leadership under previous Chinese leaders Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao have shown an overrepresentation from eastern coastal provinces such as Shandong and Jiangsu and an underrepresentation from southern coastal provinces.<sup>25</sup> This is true for PLAN leaders under Xi Jinping as well, as most PLAN leaders come from the eastern third of the country, with a significant portion hailing from the same east-coast provinces as under Jiang and Hu. We identified the hometowns for forty-nine of the eighty-eight officers examined within this data set. All of those officers hail from the eastern third of



the country (see the map). Moreover, of those forty-nine officers, thirty-nine are from coastal provinces such as Shandong (eight) or Jiangsu (eight), with others hailing from Zhejiang (five), Liaoning (four), or Beijing (four). In contrast, we could not identify any navy leaders from western provinces such as Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, or Tibet.

Some provinces that are home to critical naval installations, such as Guangdong, home of the South Sea Fleet, or Shanghai, home to important bases for the East Sea Fleet, each have only one leader in this data set, and no representation on the PLAN Standing Committee. Eight of the fourteen current PLAN Standing Committee members hail from Jiangsu (three), Shandong (three), or Hebei (two) (see table 3).

### THREE COHORTS OF NAVY LEADERS

The section below compares and contrasts members of the navy's past, present, and likely future leadership across a wide range of factors, including key

**TABLE 3**  
**HOME PROVINCES AND FIRST YEARS OF SERVICE FOR PLAN STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Name	Position	Home Province	First Year of Service
Adm. Wu Shengli	PLAN Commander	Zhejiang <sup>a</sup>	1964
Lt. Gen. Miao Hua	PLAN Political Commissar	Fujian	1972
Vice Adm. Wang Dengping	PLAN Deputy Political Commissar	Anhui	1970
Vice Adm. Ding Haichun	PLAN Deputy Political Commissar	Hunan	1972
Vice Adm. Tian Zhong	PLAN Deputy Commander	Hebei	1974
Vice Adm. Jiang Weilie	PLAN Deputy Commander	Jiangsu	1972
Vice Adm. Liu Yi	PLAN Deputy Commander	Shandong	1972
Vice Adm. Ding Yi	PLAN Deputy Commander	Jiangsu	1976
Vice Adm. Du Jingchen	PLAN Deputy Commander	Shandong	1969
Vice Adm. Wang Hai	PLAN Deputy Commander	Zhejiang	Unknown
Vice Adm. Qiu Yanpeng	PLAN Chief of Staff	Shandong	1974
Rear Adm. Yang Shiguang	Director, PLAN Political Department	Unknown	Unknown
Rear Adm. Xu Weibing	Director, PLAN Logistics Department	Jiangsu	1978
Rear Adm. Wang Jianguo	Director, PLAN Equipment Department	Unknown	Unknown

Note:

a. Admiral Wu grew up in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, as his father was mayor of that city in the 1950s. However, Wu's ancestral home is Wujiao, Hebei Province, which is also the hometown of Admiral Sun Jianguo. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for highlighting this distinction.

historical experiences during the early stages of their careers, access to formal technical and professional education, approach to doctrine, experience engaging with foreign military personnel, and combat experience. This comparison is summarized in table 4.

PLA NAVY LEADERS BY PROVINCE

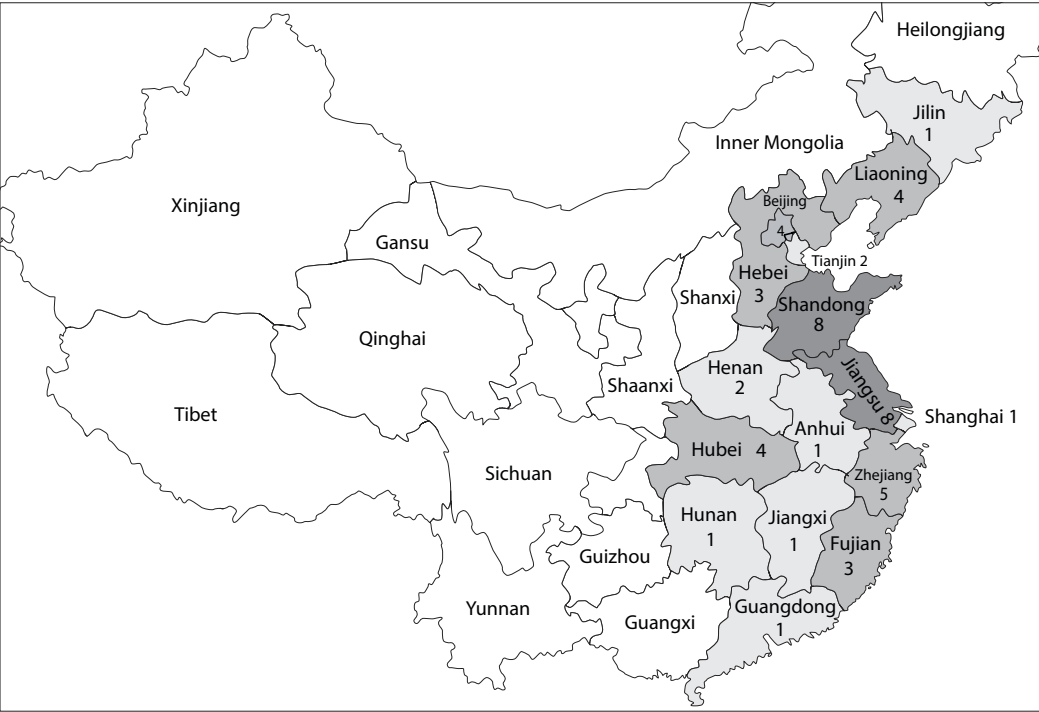


TABLE 4  
THREE COHORTS OF PLA NAVY OFFICERS

Cohort	Early Career Period	Defining Historic Event	Professional Technical Expertise	Doctrine	International Engagement	Combat Experience
Old Guard	Late 1960s Early 1970s	Cultural Revolution (1966–76)	Limited or no formal training until midcareer	Soviet Young School; Mao's People's War at Sea	Limited engagement at senior levels	Limited
Rising Cohort	Mid-1970s Early 1980s	Economic and military reforms (1979–85)	Rudimentary technical training	Offshore defense	Growing engagement opportunities as midcareer officers	None
Future Leadership	Later 1980s	Military modernization (1986–92)	Increasingly sophisticated training as junior officers	Offshore defense and far-seas protection	Operational-level engagement as junior officers	None

### *The Impact of History on China's Navy Leadership*

Shared historical experiences, particularly during individuals' "formative years" (late teens to early twenties), are frequently used to analyze Chinese military and political elites.<sup>26</sup> Most of the officers examined here joined the military during these years, making this approach particularly well suited to the study of China's naval leadership. Differences among the cohorts are also exacerbated by the extreme changes that occurred in China over the past few decades. For example, while members of the navy's Old Guard grew up under Maoist socialism and began their military careers during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, members of the slightly younger Rising Cohort began their careers during a period of significant transition, for both the military and China overall. In contrast, those in the PLAN's Future Leadership are some of the first officers to have never known anything but a stable and prosperous China increasingly powerful and confident on the world stage.

*The Cultural Revolution and China's Old Guard.* Although many have recently stepped down, PLAN officers who joined the PLA in the 1960s or early 1970s remain in key positions. They include PLAN commander Wu Shengli as well as PLAN Standing Committee members deputy commander Vice Admiral Du Jingchen and deputy political commissar Vice Admiral Wang Dengping. Officers within this cohort came of age during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, a period during which China experienced a breakdown of society and government as Mao sought to reestablish authority over the country through continuous and often violent revolution. During this time, the lives of millions were affected, including many of the PLAN's Old Guard.

For example, PLAN officers who began their military careers at this time worked within an organization focused almost exclusively on domestic political issues rather than professional military training and execution. With the breakdown of political authority, PLA troops, including PLAN units, were called on to secure important centers of power and maintain law and order. During the Wuhan incident in 1967—a pitched battle between rival political factions for control of the Hubei provincial capital—Mao dispatched PLAN gunboats from the East Sea Fleet to provide support to his factions fighting in the city.<sup>27</sup> Other units protected critical naval infrastructure on the Zhoushan islands near Shanghai, and their personnel provided temporary port labor to ensure the continued flow of necessary supplies.<sup>28</sup>

Opportunities for the PLAN's Old Guard to receive formal training and professional military education (PME) during this time were almost nonexistent. By the mid-1960s, most of China's PME institutions were shut down, and formal training and technical knowledge were radically de-emphasized. For example,

previous standards that required PLA Navy submarines to be manned with a 70 : 30 ratio of qualified to unqualified crewmen ran counter to Maoist teachings that political will could overcome a lack of specialized expertise, so they were revised to allow for as much as 80 percent of a submarine's crew to be newly assigned, unqualified personnel.<sup>29</sup> As many as 3,800 officers, including eleven rear admirals, were purged during this time.<sup>30</sup>

Many in the current upper echelon of navy leaders were forced to wait until the late 1970s to receive any form of PME. In 1964, just as many of the nation's educational institutions were being shuttered, Admiral Wu was enrolled at the PLA Surveying and Mapping College in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, where he would remain until 1968.<sup>31</sup> In 1968, Admiral Liu Xiaojiang, who only recently retired as PLAN political commissar, worked on a rural commune in Shaanxi as an "educated youth."<sup>32</sup> Although he joined the PLA in 1968, Admiral Sun Jianguo, the PLAN's third-highest-ranking naval officer, was unable to attend the Naval Submarine Academy until 1978.<sup>33</sup> Recently retired deputy commander Vice Admiral Zhang Yongyi had to wait years before attending the Shenyang Air Force Academy.<sup>34</sup>

*From Cultural Revolution to Reform and Opening: The PLAN's Rising Cohort.* As the older generation of leaders retires, officers who joined the PLA in the middle-to-late 1970s or early 1980s are replacing them. Many of the PLAN's newly promoted Standing Committee members are part of this group, including deputy commanders Vice Admiral Tian Zhong and Vice Admiral Ding Yi, and chief of staff Vice Admiral Qiu Yanpeng. They join PLAN Logistics Department director Xu Weibing as part of China's Rising Cohort of naval leaders.

Age differences between the Old Guard and the Rising Cohort are not always great. The Rising Cohort's Vice Admiral Jiang Weilie, for example, who joined the PLA in 1972, is not far removed from the Old Guard's deputy political commissar Vice Admiral Wang Dengping or deputy commander Vice Admiral Du Jingchen, who joined the PLA in 1970 and 1969, respectively. Members of the Rising Cohort were therefore affected by the Cultural Revolution as well. Yet as they were just a few years younger, those experiences were often radically different. Members of the Rising Cohort likely experienced the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution as civilians, since many of the most violent events took place in 1967 and 1968, immediately before they joined the PLA. Absent the PLA's institutional protections, they were more likely to have been part of the "sent-down youth" movement, which forced roughly 12 million urban youths to work in the countryside between 1968 and 1975.<sup>35</sup> Current NSF commander Yuan Yubai, an older member of this cohort but one who did not join the PLA until 1973, spent two years as a member of his county's "Basic Line Education Work Team," in Gongan County, Hubei Province.<sup>36</sup>

While marked by the Cultural Revolution, the PLAN's Rising Cohort also benefited greatly from China's economic reform and opening period as well as the PLA's early modernization efforts, both of which began in the early 1980s. By 1978, Deng Xiaoping had begun dismantling the collective system of rural agricultural production and establishing incentives for state-owned industries to increase production—steps that would put the Chinese economy on the road to three decades of double-digit growth. Around the same time, the PLA had reestablished its educational and training institutions, focusing primarily on rotational training and unit readiness. Cultural Revolution policies of preparing for total war gave way to training to fight what the PLA refers to as “local wars under high-tech conditions.” Most importantly, ideological purity was replaced with technical acumen, with a shift in emphasis back from “red” to “expert.”<sup>37</sup> Thus the Rising Cohort represents the first group of leaders who did not have to transition from an ideological to a professional focus midway through their careers.

*A Rising and Confident China: The PLA Navy's Future Leaders.* As the Rising Cohort moves up the ranks, this is creating space for a younger group of officers who came of age in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While they have not yet ascended to top leadership positions, in all probability the PLAN's next true “generation” of leaders—in the sense that they will be removed from their predecessors' experiences during the Cultural Revolution—will come from this cohort. Many in this younger cohort are currently serving in naval academic institutions or as ship commanding officers (COs) or political commissars. Examples include Senior Captain Li Hanjun, who until 2014 was serving as the director of the training department at PLAN headquarters and is now the director of the military training department at the Naval Command Academy.<sup>38</sup> This also includes Senior Captain Zhang Zheng, the CO of the PLA Navy's aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*; Zou Fuquan, the CO of *Haikou* (CNS 171) during the first Gulf of Aden escort operation in 2008; and Senior Captain Zhao Xiaogang, the PLA Navy's task force commander for China's first-ever participation in RIMPAC.<sup>39</sup>

Born in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these officers were children or adolescents during the Cultural Revolution, although it still undoubtedly influenced their lives. In their adult lives, however, they have experienced a much more stable domestic and international environment and an increasingly powerful and prosperous China. By the mid-to-late 1980s, when many of these officers were still in the early stages of their military careers, China's relations with the United States and the Soviet Union had improved considerably, allowing Deng Xiaoping in 1985 to put forth his strategic reassessment of the current international climate as one in which China could expect at least two decades of international stability.<sup>40</sup> These changes to China's strategic outlook mean that once these officers

move into top-level positions, they will be the first PLAN leadership cohort to have never served in a navy preparing for total war.

China's reassessment of its international environment also allowed the PLA to rethink its approach to training, modernization, and national defense. In the mid-1990s, Jiang Zemin's policy of "two transformations" (*liangge zhuanbian*, 两个转变) called for the army to shift from preparing to fight local wars under normal conditions to fighting local wars in a high-tech environment, and for the PLA as a whole to shift toward relying on quality rather than quantity.<sup>41</sup> As part of this reassessment, the PLA Navy in particular sought to professionalize its officer corps and improve training and recruitment, and officers within this younger cohort have benefited significantly. For example, since these officers joined the PLA in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the PLA has been downsized by roughly 1.7 million personnel.<sup>42</sup> In addition, while much remains unknown about the importance of personal connections in the PLA promotion system, this is also the first group of navy officers for whom actual retirement at prescribed mandatory ages is the standard, making promotion practices more routine.

The PLA Navy, like the PLA more broadly, has also sought to improve retention through increased compensation and improved living standards; PLAN commander Wu himself has written on this subject.<sup>43</sup> The navy's procurement of advanced weaponry in the mid- and late 1990s created even greater emphasis on educating and training officers who could operate, support, and maintain these new systems.<sup>44</sup> Thus, as this cohort of officers was joining up, the PLAN was beginning to recruit more college-educated personnel.<sup>45</sup> A growing number of younger PLAN officers have also studied in top-tier Chinese civilian universities; they include Senior Captain Zhang Zheng, who graduated from Shanghai Jiaotong University in 1990 with a degree in engineering.<sup>46</sup> While the PLAN's PME system continues to undergo reforms, the improvements China's navy has already made since these officers joined the PLA means the navy's Future Leadership includes some of the most highly trained and technically proficient personnel in the modern history of the PLAN.<sup>47</sup>

### *China's Changing Approach to Naval Doctrine*

As the PLAN leadership continues to transition to a new and younger cohort of leaders, so has the PLAN's approach to doctrine changed. Members of the navy's Old Guard were greatly influenced in their early careers by Mao's views of guerrilla warfare, adapted to the navy in the form of "People's War at Sea," as well as Soviet naval doctrine in the form of the Young School. In contrast, members of the PLAN's Rising Cohort were introduced in the early and middle stages of their careers to the concept of offshore or "near seas" defense (*jinhai fangyu*, 近海防御), a reorientation of Chinese naval assets seaward, and an extension of China's

area of operations. This gradual extension of the PLAN's area of operations continued with Hu Jintao's 2004 directive for the PLA to take on "new historic missions," pushing the PLAN farther and farther afield.<sup>48</sup>

*People's War at Sea: The Influence of Mao and the Soviet Union.* Navy operations and doctrine in the PLAN's early years were heavily influenced by two independent strands of thought: Mao's views of guerrilla warfare and Russian views regarding asymmetric warfare at sea.<sup>49</sup> While distinct approaches, both favored the use of smaller units operating in dispersed groups to engage in commerce raiding and coastal defense, and the PLAN's approach to warfare reflected this influence. For example, Chinese writings on naval operations during the PLAN's early years described the importance of "mak[ing] the best use of the sorghum fields at sea—the reefs, islets, cold, fog, and waves—and bring[ing] into full play the tactics and strategy of people's war."<sup>50</sup>

The PLAN's early approach to war fighting can be seen in early coastal operations against Kuomintang (KMT) forces in the 1950s. In the 1954–55 naval ambush operations off the coast of Zhejiang, for example, the PLA Navy conducted surprise attacks against KMT frigates and gunships using torpedo boats hidden among larger merchant ships moving down the coast. These torpedo boats were then dispatched on a rainy night with low visibility, and were able to get within four kilometers of their KMT targets before being detected, successfully sinking the KMT frigate *Taiping* and KMT gunship *Dongting*.<sup>51</sup>

The PLAN's limited capacity to remain at sea for prolonged periods surely limited any opportunities for members of the navy's Old Guard to acquire blue-water experience early in their careers. However, this focus on hit-and-run tactics and guerrilla warfare shows that the PLAN's transition to its current form resulted as much from a radical shift in mind-set as from the acquisition of new technology and operational capabilities.

*The Rising Cohort and Offshore Defense.* Deng Xiaoping's 1985 reassessment of the international strategic environment helped usher in a shift in the PLA Navy's strategy to "offshore defense" (*jinhai fangyu*, 近海防御), which sought to extend China's strategic maritime periphery farther from its borders. Much ink has already been spilled in analyzing in nuanced detail this shift in doctrine.<sup>52</sup> For those in the navy's Rising Cohort, however, this new doctrine fundamentally changed how they would think about war fighting. The PLAN would no longer use hit-and-run tactics but instead would train and prepare to fight in "more substantial and organized formations."<sup>53</sup>

The PLAN's shift to offshore defense would also expand its area of operations farther from China's coast, creating what may be the most important difference between this cohort and its predecessor: namely, that a much larger component



of the Rising Cohort has direct experience with blue-water operations.<sup>54</sup> Such operations have become an increasingly important component of the PLAN's regimen, and active-duty PLAN officers have not been shy in noting the importance of blue-water operations to the future of the PLAN. For example, speaking to the *PLA Daily* in 2012, current chief of staff then-rear admiral Qiu Yanpeng noted, "With the constant improvement of China's naval equipment and support capability, the waters for maritime training also keep expanding. Open-sea training has become an effective means and inevitable choice to enhance the combat capability of the PLA Navy."<sup>55</sup> China's 2013 defense white paper notes that the PLA Navy is "intensifying blue-water training" and "improving the training mode of task force formation in blue water."<sup>56</sup>

Prior to personnel changes in 2014, few members of the PLAN leadership had any extensive experience with blue-water operations. With the exception of Du Jingchen, no Standing Committee member had been involved with the PLAN's Gulf of Aden escort mission, a well-known and long-standing blue-water mission.<sup>57</sup> Now not only is Vice Admiral Du joined by Vice Admiral Qiu Yanpeng as another Standing Committee member with such experience (Qiu led the fourth escort mission, in 2010), but almost half the members of the Standing Committee have similar experiences leading blue-water operations.<sup>58</sup> Other members of the Rising Cohort with similar blue-water experience have recently been promoted as well. Rear Admiral Zhang Wendan, the commander of the fifth Gulf of Aden task force, was recently promoted to SSF chief of staff. Rear Admiral Zhou Xuming, the leader of the twelfth task force, was promoted to NSF deputy commander.<sup>59</sup>

Early blue-water operations likely carried significant weight for the few members of the Old Guard who commanded them. For the navy's Rising Cohort, however, the impact on a career of commanding a blue-water operation is not automatic. To paraphrase a senior PLA Navy officer:

Taking part in the escort operations is something we increasingly emphasize in promotion. *But escort participation by itself does not guarantee promotion* [emphasis added]. It is not the case that if you take part in the escort operations, you will be promoted, and if you do not take part, you will not be promoted. If you take part in the escort, and you show a good performance, then you may be promoted [paraphrase].<sup>60</sup>

Nor does commanding a Gulf of Aden task force specifically appear to lead directly to promotion. While Vice Admiral Du was promoted less than a year after commanding China's first escort mission in the Gulf of Aden, no other Gulf of Aden task force commander was promoted so quickly. Indeed, of the first fourteen officers who led a Gulf of Aden escort mission between 2008 and 2013, six remain in the same position at the time of this writing.<sup>61</sup>

*China's Expanding Interests Abroad and the Next Generation of PLAN Leaders.*

Since Hu Jintao's 2004 "New Historic Missions" speech, in which he declared that China's interests abroad were expanding, and that the PLA, particularly the PLA Navy, had an important role to play in defending those interests, the PLAN has extended its operations farther afield.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, this trend appears to show no sign of slowing down. For example, the 2013 "Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces" notes the continuing importance of "comprehensive security" (*zonghe anquan*, 综合安全), including the strengthening of China's overseas operational capabilities such as search and rescue and emergency evacuation and protecting China's overseas interests, all of which are important missions for China's navy.<sup>63</sup> One of the main themes of the 2015 defense white paper "China's Military Strategy" is the need for China to "safeguard its maritime rights and interests," which requires that "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great[er] importance be attached to managing the sea and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests."<sup>64</sup>

These two documents continue the shift in the PLA's focus from the land to the sea, and from China's coastal and littoral regions to far-seas operations. While it is too soon to know for certain the impact this trend will have on the PLAN's Future Leadership cohort, two distinct possibilities suggest themselves.

First, the PLA's continued placement of greater emphasis on China's maritime rights and interests may create opportunities for PLAN personnel to chip away slowly at the PLA ground force's monopoly on positions of power.

Second, as the PLAN continues to embrace its global role, the navy's Future Leadership may increasingly take on the views and perspectives of officers who work in a truly blue-water navy. While this is not to suggest that China's younger leaders will forsake traditional security operations, some PLAN personnel have already noted that China's younger officers are more interested in far-seas operations outside the first island chain.<sup>65</sup> As the PLAN continues this decades-long shift from being an inward-looking, coastal-defense force to an outward-looking, expeditionary navy, the PLAN's next generation of leaders will have more experience at sea than any group of Chinese navy leaders in modern history.

*International Engagement with Foreign Navies*

Each successive cohort of PLAN leadership has become increasingly comfortable and confident operating in an international environment. While members of the navy's Old Guard were almost completely isolated from the international maritime community early in their careers, those in the Rising Cohort have had opportunities to engage with that community, developing a confidence and sophistication honed from experience with naval diplomacy unavailable to most of their older counterparts save those of the highest rank. Yet even this confidence

and experience are quickly being overshadowed by those in the PLAN's Future Leadership, who engage with foreign navies not only diplomatically but operationally, increasingly working side by side with their foreign counterparts in bilateral and multilateral naval exercises as junior officers.

For China's Old Guard, international engagement with foreign navies came late in their careers. The Cultural Revolution effectively shut down China's naval diplomacy, and with the exception of a handful of senior exchanges with the North Korean and Sri Lankan navies, China's naval diplomacy did not restart until the mid-1980s.<sup>66</sup> For example, the PLA Navy did not conduct its first port visit until 1985, when a three-ship task force visited Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The Chinese navy only began to conduct combined military exercises with foreign navies in earnest in the early 2000s, and the PLAN's first bilateral maritime exercise in the region did not take place until 2007, when members of the Old Guard were already well established in their careers.

When the PLAN did begin engaging with foreign militaries, the importance of these initial operations meant that they were entrusted to established senior officers. For example, PLAN deputy commander Ding Yiping led the PLAN's first global circumnavigation in 2002 as a vice admiral. Vice Admiral Du Jingchen, one of the PLAN's current deputy commanders, led the PLAN's first Gulf of Aden operations as the South Sea Fleet's chief of staff, but was promoted less than a year later to PLAN chief of staff.

*The PLAN's Rising Cohort and Increasing International Engagement.* The members of the PLAN's Rising Cohort have had more exposure to naval diplomacy engagement at much earlier stages in their careers than their predecessors. As the PLAN continues to be China's primary service for military diplomacy—conducting counter-piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden, humanitarian missions via the PLAN's hospital ship *Peace Ark*, and traditional combat exercises such as the annual MARITIME COOPERATION exercise with Russia—the opportunity to engage with foreign navy personnel has become increasingly common.<sup>67</sup> For example, as a senior captain commanding the East Sea Fleet's 6th Destroyer Flotilla in 2007, then-rear admiral Qiu Yanpeng led the PLAN's contingent in AMAN-07, a Pakistan-hosted multilateral exercise with eight other nations, including the United States. This marked the first time China participated in a multilateral combined naval exercise, the first time a PLAN task force traveled abroad without a supply ship, and the first time the navy used live ammunition overseas.<sup>68</sup>

*China's Future Leadership: Working with and alongside Foreign Navies.* While the PLAN's Rising Cohort has had substantial international engagement experience compared with the Old Guard, much of it has been limited to cursory diplomatic events such as meetings during port visits or communications at sea. In contrast,

China's Future Leadership has begun actually operating with rather than simply alongside foreign navies. For example, although U.S. Navy and PLAN ships have been interacting in the Gulf of Aden for years, in 2013 the two navies conducted their first exercise in that region, which included boarding operations, live-fire drills, and helicopter landings.<sup>69</sup> In September of that year the two navies conducted additional exercises off the coast of Hawaii.<sup>70</sup> In the summer of 2014, China sent four ships to participate for the first time in RIMPAC, the world's largest multilateral naval exercise. Senior Captain Zhao Xiaogang, the PLA Navy's task force commander at RIMPAC 2014, and the COs of the PLAN's four ships at the exercise each worked closely with ships from the U.S., French, Singaporean, and other navies for weeks, conducting a wide range of drills at sea and interacting with them on a daily basis.

Working so closely with foreign navies at such an early stage in one's career was not a possibility for those in the PLAN's Rising Cohort, and was unthinkable for Admiral Wu and other members of the Old Guard early in their careers. As the PLAN continues to work alongside and operate with foreign navies, China's future navy leaders will be provided with a fundamentally deeper knowledge and understanding of foreign navies than can be claimed even by members of the Rising Cohort.

### *Combat Experience*

While younger generations of PLA Navy leaders are becoming increasingly well educated, trained, and experienced with operations abroad, one characteristic that unites all three cohorts is their lack of combat experience. Historically, the PLAN's combat experience has been limited to a few operations, including the liberation of offshore islands from the KMT in the 1950s, two small skirmishes with KMT forces in 1965, and clashes with the Vietnamese navy in 1974 and 1988 over the Paracel (Xisha) Islands and Johnson Reef (Chigua Jiao) in the Spratly Islands, respectively.<sup>71</sup>

We have no evidence that any of China's current leadership has been directly involved in combat operations. Even the navy's Old Guard would have been too young to have experienced most of the PLAN's operations, which took place before even Admiral Wu, the PLAN's elder statesman, joined the PLA. Many of the Rising Cohort joined the PLAN around the time of the PLAN's clash with Vietnam over the Paracels in 1974. This includes current PLAN Standing Committee members Vice Admiral Tian Zhong and Vice Admiral Qiu Yanpeng as well as ESF deputy commander Rear Admiral Shen Hao. Again, the short, confined nature of these operations likely precluded any of these officers from participating directly, and certainly means they were unable to garner significant combat experience even if they did participate. However, for those officers joining the PLA

at this time, the navy's success likely served as a positive contrast to the failures of the PLA ground forces in the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War.

The available evidence indicates that the closest any of China's current navy leaders came to participating in any of these operations was Admiral Wu's role in the 14 March 1988 Johnson South Reef skirmish (*chiguajiao haizhan*, 吃瓜礁海战).<sup>72</sup> Although not directly involved, Admiral Wu was serving at the time as commander of the East Sea Fleet's 6th Destroyer Flotilla (*zhidui*, 支队), and had authority over the frigate *Yingtian* (CNS 531), which took part in the conflict.<sup>73</sup>

### THE FUTURE OF PLA NAVY LEADERSHIP

With the PLA Navy undergoing one of the most substantial leadership transitions in recent history, this article has sought to compare and contrast the members of the PLAN's Old Guard, who joined the PLA during the Cultural Revolution and who are fast retiring, with the Rising Cohort of leaders who are taking their place. The article also examines the navy's Future Leadership, whose eventual ascent will mark a second watershed moment in the evolution of China's navy leadership.

The findings above suggest that a profound shift is already under way in terms of the levels of professional education, training, international experience, and direct experience with the navy's new operations that the PLAN's emerging leaders possess. While the Old Guard was tasked with overseeing a navy that was rapidly transforming, the vast majority of them had little if any personal experience with the skill sets they sought to develop within that navy. Although under this Old Guard the navy began to recruit officer candidates with greater levels of formal education and provide them with more-robust training, they themselves had had limited opportunities for such training. Although the navy began to conduct advanced blue-water operations under their tenure, very few of these leaders, who joined a coastal-defense force during the Cultural Revolution, had that type of experience themselves.

How unique is China in this regard? Many developing navies must manage a certain level of inversion in the technical skills found in their institution's personnel, with younger, lower-ranking members being more technically sophisticated than their older, higher-ranking counterparts. Developing navies in South Korea, India, Vietnam, and others have faced similar challenges. However, the evidence provided above suggests that this difference has been particularly acute for China. Very few countries denigrated the possession of technical skill and knowledge or treated technical training as inversely related to political loyalty to the extent that China did during much of the early military careers of members of the Old Guard. Few countries were as closed to the outside world as China during the Cultural Revolution. Viewed in this context, the accomplishments of this fast-retiring cohort of PLAN leaders are all the more remarkable.

The article's findings also suggest that each successive cohort of navy leadership is increasingly developing the characteristics and obtaining the maritime engagement experiences found in the officer corps of other modern, developed navies. The Rising Cohort is more at ease interacting with foreign navies than its predecessor, while those in the Future Leadership cohort have operated with U.S. Navy ships and studied alongside foreign naval officers in NATO member countries.<sup>74</sup> These traits will likely facilitate future engagement with naval officers from the United States and U.S.-allied countries, with whom they are likely to have more and more in common.

Despite these changes, it is important to note some of the similarities that remain between the old and the new. Like the Old Guard, the Rising Cohort is dominated by officers from China's developed coastal provinces. Like their predecessors, they have a living memory of the Cultural Revolution, one of the most dangerous and unstable periods in modern Chinese history. Although it is unclear how this experience affected individual officers, they all remember a time when China was weak, unstable, and under constant threat of war.

Finally, it is important to note that, despite the PLAN's growing professionalism, PLA Navy leaders remain firmly embedded within the CCP. While some have suggested the possibility that military modernization and PLA professionalization would lead to a Huntingtonian-style transition from a party to a national army, this has not occurred.<sup>75</sup> In fact, the party continues to have control over PLAN personnel decisions, reflected over the past few years most clearly in the CCP's expansive anticorruption campaign, which has removed a number of senior military figures on charges of corruption or lack of party discipline. Within the navy, key leaders who have been caught up in the campaign include deputy PLAN political commissar Vice Admiral Ma Faxiang and Rear Admiral Jiang Zhonghua, the director of the Equipment Department for China's South Sea Fleet.<sup>76</sup> Thus, it is important to remember that despite this growing professionalism among PLAN personnel, China's new navy leaders will remain subject to strict party control and oversight and will continue to identify first and foremost with the party.

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## NOTES

1. In 2015, Rear Adm. Wang Hai was promoted from chief of staff of the North Sea Fleet to PLA Navy deputy commander, increasing the number of deputy commanders to six, and the total number of members of the PLAN Standing Committee to fourteen. See “王海少将任海军副司令 曾任辽宁舰编队司令”

[*Wanghai xiaojiang ren haijun fu siling ceng ren liaoningjian biandui siling*] [Rear Admiral Wang Hai Promoted to Deputy Commander Served as Commander of Liaoning Strike Group], *Sina*, 22 July 2015, [www.mil.news.sina.com.cn/2015-07-22/0924835560.html](http://www.mil.news.sina.com.cn/2015-07-22/0924835560.html).



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3. Pyoung K. Yi, "PRC Vice Admiral Tours Mercy during RIMPAC 2014," *America's Navy*, 20 July 2014, [www.navy.mil/](http://www.navy.mil/).
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5. Lu Siqing, "消息指下月四中全会海军司令员吴胜利可能退休" [*Xiaoxi zhixiyue sizhong quanhui haijun silingyuan wu shengli keneng tuixiu*] [News That PLA Navy Commander Wu Shengli May Retire Next Month at the 4th Plenary Session], *Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy*, 24 September 2012.
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7. For a small sample of such work see for example Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy Enters the Twenty-First Century* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001); Thomas J. Bickford, *Uncertain Waters: Thinking about China's Emergence as a Maritime Power* (Alexandria, Va.: CNA, 2011); Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2013); Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Nan Li, eds., *China, the United States, and 21st-Century Sea Power: Defining a Maritime Security Partnership* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2010); Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 8 September 2014).
8. Dianqing Wu, 在毛泽东关怀下成长起来的萧经光 [*Zai Mao Zedong guanhuaxia chengchang qilai de Xiao Jingguang dajiang*] [Admiral Xiao Jingguang Growing Up under the Care of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: People's Press, 2007), pp. 146–49.
9. Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007* (Washington, D.C.: 2007), pp. 12–13.
10. The Second Artillery is a separate branch of the PLA and serves as China's strategic missile force.
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13. On the PLA Military Affairs Department, see David Finkelstein, "The General Staff Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army: Organization, Roles, & Missions," in *The People's Liberation Army as Organization: Reference Volume v1.0*, ed. James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N. D. Yang, Conference Proceedings (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2002), p. 171. On the PLAN Military Affairs Department, see Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy* (Alexandria, Va.: CNA, 2013), p. 238.
14. Finkelstein, "General Staff Department," p. 146.
15. "Liu Zhuoming Promoted to Deputy Director of the Science and Technology Commission in the General Armament Department," *Oumil*, 31 August 2011. On the Science and Technology Commission, see Eric Hagt, *China's Defense High-Tech Leadership: Implications for*



- Se&T Innovation*, Policy Brief 22 (San Diego: Univ. of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, September 2011).
16. Zhang Tao, ed., "Interview with Guan Youfei, Director of Foreign Affairs Office of MND," *Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, 17 April 2013, [www.eng.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2013-04/17/content\\_5303997.htm](http://www.eng.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2013-04/17/content_5303997.htm); U.S. Army Pacific, "U.S., China Conduct Disaster Management Exchange," *U.S. Department of Defense*, 25 November 2013, [www.defense.gov/](http://www.defense.gov/).
  17. See for example Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*; and Cheng Li, "Wu Shengli—China's Top Future Leaders to Watch," *Brookings*, [www.brookings.edu/](http://www.brookings.edu/).
  18. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2006).
  19. The thirteenth member of the PLAN Standing Committee in 2013 was PLAN Equipment Department director Hu Yuhao. However, we do not know his birth date or when he joined the PLA.
  20. This includes Adms. Wu Shengli and Sun Jianguo, and Lt. Gen. Miao Hua. For dates of birth for U.S. Navy O-10 officers, see *Wikipedia*, [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org).
  21. Matt Bewig, "Chief of Naval Operations: Who Is Jonathan Greenert?," *AllGov*, 16 June 2012, [www.allgov.com/](http://www.allgov.com/).
  22. This average age for the current PLAN Standing Committee omits two members (Rear Adm. Yang Shiguang and Rear Adm. Wang Jianguo) whose dates of birth remain unreported in open-source materials.
  23. See *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xianyi junguanfa* (中华人民共和国现役军官法) [Law of the People's Republic of China on Officers in Active Service] (promulgated by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 5 September 1988), available at [www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=6236&CGid=](http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=6236&CGid=).
  24. Deputy commanders Chen Xitao and Gao Zhongxing from the Beijing MR, Zhong Shenqin from the Jinan MR, Zou Gengren from the Lanzhou MR, Gui Qianzhi from the Chengdu MR, Yu Jixun from the PLA Second Artillery, and Wang Chaoqun from the PLA Air Force.
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  27. Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China's Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1982), p. 242.
  28. *Ibid.*, pp. 241–42.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
  30. Lyle Goldstein, "From Humble Origins: China's Submarine Force Comes of Age," *Undersea Warfare* (Winter 2004).
  31. Center for China Studies, "Profile of Wu Shengli," *National Taiwan Chengchi University*, [www.ics.nccu.edu.tw/chinaleaders/profile.php?id=2787](http://www.ics.nccu.edu.tw/chinaleaders/profile.php?id=2787).
  32. "Liu Xiaojiang," 中国国情 [*Zhongguo guoqing*] [The State of China], 30 January 2012, [www.china.com.cn/guoqing/2012-01/30/content\\_24506383\\_2.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/guoqing/2012-01/30/content_24506383_2.htm).
  33. Becker, Liebenberg, and Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope*, p. 36.
  34. Given the limited naval aviation capacities of the PLA Navy during this time, Vice Admiral Zhang, like many naval aviators, originally joined the PLA Air Force, switching to the PLA Navy only later in his career.
  35. Thomas P. Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1977).

36. "Yuan Yubai," *Gongan County Website*, 22 November 2010, [www.gongan.gov.cn/news\\_show.aspx?id=12403](http://www.gongan.gov.cn/news_show.aspx?id=12403).
37. The formula "red versus expert" describes the common tension in Maoist China between a focus on ideological purity and a possession of technical skill and acumen.
38. "李汉军任海军指挥学院训练部部长" [*Lihanjun ren haijun zhihui xueyuan xunlianbu buzhang*] [Li Hanjun Promoted to Director of the Training Department at the Naval Command Academy], 秦都布衣的博客 [*Qindu buyi de boke*] [Qindu Commoner Blog], 25 April 2014, [www.blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_6ac4e1aa0102ebmh.html](http://www.blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_6ac4e1aa0102ebmh.html).
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40. Yao Yunzhu, "The Evolution of Military Doctrine of the Chinese PLA from 1985 to 1995," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 7, no. 2 (1995), pp. 57–62.
41. Kristen Gunness and Fred Vellucci, "Reforming the Officer Corps: Keeping the College Grads In, the Peasants Out, and the Incompetent Down," in *The "People" in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China's Military*, ed. Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner (Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), p. 192.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 194–95.
43. Wu Shengli, "Beginning to Bid Farewell to Sleeping and Eating aboard the Ship in Port: The Lifestyle Revolution for Chinese Sailors," *解放军生活* [*Jiefangjun shenghuo*] [*PLA Life*], no. 9 (2010).
44. Kenneth Allen and Morgan Clemens, *The Recruitment, Education, and Training of PLA Navy Personnel*, China Maritime Study 12 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press for the China Maritime Studies Institute, 2014), p. 2.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–4.
46. News Center, "SJTU Alumni Commissioned Chief Designer and Captain of China's First Aircraft Carrier," *Shanghai Jiaotong University*, 26 September 2012, [www.en.sjtu.edu.cn/news/sjtu-alumni-commissioned-chief-designer-and-captain-of-chinas-first-aircraft-carrier/](http://www.en.sjtu.edu.cn/news/sjtu-alumni-commissioned-chief-designer-and-captain-of-chinas-first-aircraft-carrier/).
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48. Murray Scot Tanner and Peter W. Mackenzie, *China's Emerging National Security Interests and Their Impact on the People's Liberation Army* (Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps Univ. Press, 2015).
49. See Martin N. Murphy and Toshi Yoshihara, "Fighting the Naval Hegemon: Evolution in French, Soviet, and Chinese Naval Thought," *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2015), pp. 13–39.
50. Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*.
51. Huang, "The PLA Navy at War, 1949–1999," pp. 257–58.
52. For a small survey of this literature see for example Murphy and Yoshihara, "Fighting the Naval Hegemon"; Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2009); Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*; and Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*.
53. Murphy and Yoshihara, "Fighting the Naval Hegemon," p. 30.
54. The Chinese term "blue-water" is *yuanhai* (远海), which has also been translated as "distant seas" or "open oceans." See, for example, Lu Xue, "Views on Improving the Armed Forces' Ability to Execute the Historic Missions," *军事科学* [*Junshi kexue*] [*Military Science*], no. 5 (2007), p. 107.
55. Sun Yanxin and Ju Zhenhua, "Chinese Navy Normalizes Open-Sea Training," *PLA Daily*, 12 December 2012.
56. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces," 16 April 2013, available at [www.news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c\\_132312681.htm](http://www.news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681.htm).
57. Du Jingchen led the PLAN's first escort operations as chief of staff of the South Sea Fleet.
58. In addition to Du Jingchen and Qiu Yanpeng, this includes Vice Adm. Wang Dengping, who led the PLAN's first global circumnavigation; Vice Adm. Tian Zhong, who led

- China's component of PEACE MISSION 2012, the PLAN's largest bilateral combined military exercise with Russia; and Vice Adm. Liu Yi, who led 2009 training events on board the PLAN training ship *Zhenghe*.
59. “周煦明接替袁誉柏任北海舰队副司令员” [Zhou xuming jieti yuan yubai beihai jiandui fusilingyuan] [Zhou Xuming Succeeds Yuan Yubai as North Sea Fleet Deputy Commander], Sohu.com, 8 November 2014, [www.news.sohu.com/20141108/n405893283.shtml](http://www.news.sohu.com/20141108/n405893283.shtml); “张文旦任南海舰队参谋长” [Zhang wendan ren haijun nanhaijiandui canmouzhang] [Zhang Wendan Promoted to South Sea Fleet Chief of Staff], *Zhenjiang Daily*, 18 March 2014.
60. Discussions with Chinese officials, 2013.
61. This includes SSF deputy commander Yao Zhilou, ESF deputy commander Wang Zhiguo, SSF chief of staff Wei Xueyi, ESF deputy commander Zhang Huachen, and SSF deputy chief of staff Li Shihong.
62. Tanner and Mackenzie, *China's Emerging National Security Interests and Their Impact on the People's Liberation Army*; Jonas Parelo-Plesner and Mathieu Duchâtel, *China's Strong Arm: Protecting Citizens and Assets Abroad*, Adelphi 451 (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2015).
63. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, “The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces.” It is important to note that these missions are not exclusive to the navy, as evidenced by the role of the PLA Air Force in the evacuation of Chinese citizens from Libya in 2014.
64. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, “China's Military Strategy,” 25 May 2015, available at [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content\\_20820628.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628.htm); Dennis J. Blasko, “The 2015 Chinese Defense White Paper on Strategy in Perspective: Maritime Missions Require a Change in the PLA Mindset,” Jamestown Foundation *China Brief* 15, no. 12 (29 May 2015), [www.jamestown.org/](http://www.jamestown.org/).
65. Discussions with unnamed PLA Navy officer, 2015.
66. Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, p. 257.
67. Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, “China's Blue Soft Power: Antipiracy, Engagement, and Image Enhancement,” *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 1 (Winter 2015); Peter W. Mackenzie, *Red Crosses, Blue Water: Hospital Ships and China's Expanding Naval Presence* (Alexandria, Va.: CNA, 2011); Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, *No Substitute for Experience: Chinese Anti-piracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden*, China Maritime Study 10 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press for the China Maritime Studies Institute, 2013).
68. Becker, Liebenberg, and Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope*, p. 197.
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70. “Chinese Naval Vessels in Rare Visit to Hawaii for Exercises with US,” *South China Morning Post*, 7 September 2013, [www.scmp.com/](http://www.scmp.com/).
71. Huang, “The PLA Navy at War, 1949–1999,” pp. 249–63.
72. In China, many major historical events are referred to by the date they occurred. This particular event is often referred to as the “3.14 Naval Battle” (3.14 *haizhan*, 海战).
73. Yang Zhongmei, 中国即将开战: 中国新军国主义崛起 [Zhongguo jijiang kaizhan: zhongguo xin junguo zhuyi jueqi] [China's Coming War: The Rise of China's New Militarism] (Taipei: Time Culture Press, 2013), pp. 201–11.
74. According to an official Chinese government website, Senior Capt. Zhang Zheng studied at the Defense Language Institute of the United Kingdom (英国国防语言学院), which we believe to be the British Defence Centre for Languages and Culture. See “Zhang Zheng, Commander of China's 1st Aircraft Carrier,” China.org.cn, 29 September 2012, [www.china.org.cn/chinese/2012-09/29/content\\_26674394.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2012-09/29/content_26674394.htm).
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## THE BATTLE OF QUEMOY

### The Amphibious Assault That Held the Postwar Military Balance in the Taiwan Strait

*Maochun Miles Yu*

**I**n the annals of the communist world, the month of October enjoys supreme sanctity. The Red October of 1917 ushered in the first socialist government, which would eventually become the Soviet Union. In the People's Republic of China (PRC), October is indelibly enshrined as the anniversary month of the founding of the communist state, observed with a multiday national celebration.

But each year, amid glorious celebratory glow marking the inauguration of the PRC, the memory of a forbidden and inglorious episode surfaces—inevitably, albeit surreptitiously and furtively—within China's educated and political elite. The event took place a little over three weeks after Mao Zedong triumphantly announced at Tiananmen Square, on 1 October 1949, the establishment of the People's Republic. It is the subject of a substantial and nagging controversy that is antithetical to the overall academic and political discouragement of real historical debate, especially concerning any stain on the exalted victories of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). To most inside China who know and care about the

episode, it was an ignominious defeat that undercuts the familiar and mandatory political culture of triumph and glory.

The episode was the battle of Quemoy, known in Taiwan as the battle of Guningtou Beach, which raged for three days, 25 to 27 October 1949. The outcome was the total annihilation of three PLA regiments, totaling over nine thousand soldiers, at the hands of a beat-up and retreating Nationalist contingent. But what has made the battle of

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Quemoy so significant in the military history of the PRC, what has shaped its enduring legacy and impact, is not just the lopsided defeat of the PLA troops but how it was fought, its inauspicious timing, and the exposure of the PLA's inability to conduct naval and amphibious warfare.

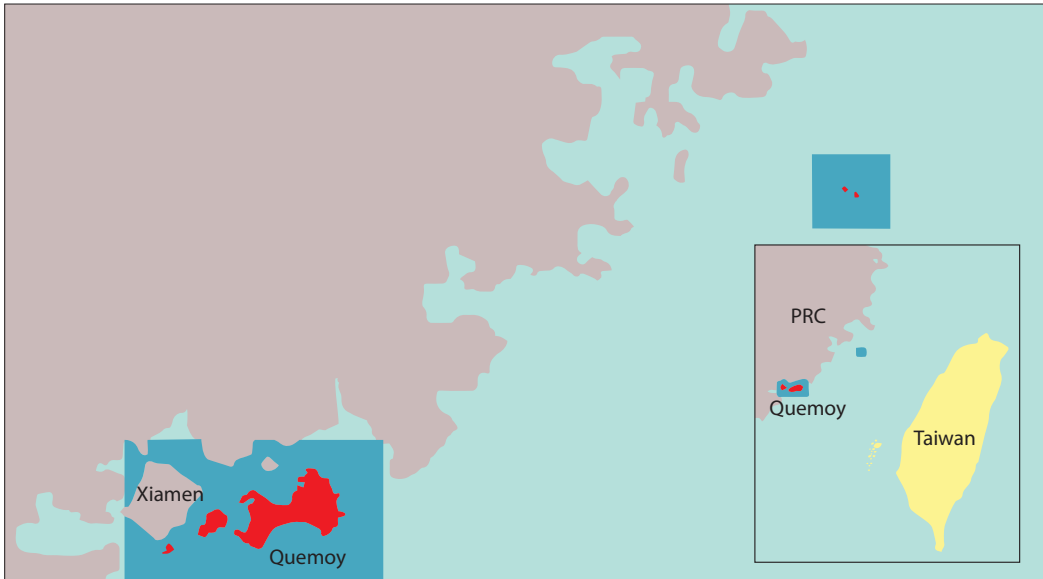
This paper seeks to analyze the key contentious issues related to the PLA's Quemoy fiasco, mainly from documents and sources published in mainland China and recently made available to the public. Though not grand or ambitious in scope, the paper endeavors to look at how and why the battle of Quemoy was fought and to dispel a few prevailing but mistaken notions based on faulty logic and the changing historical narratives emerging from China's highly mutable political climate. Finally, it addresses, first, the pivotal role the battle played in setting the pattern of confrontation that has produced a six-decade political and military separation between Nationalist Taiwan and Communist China and, second, how the battle affected the United States in its Cold War strategy.

## THE BATTLE

Quemoy, variously also called Jinmen, Chin-men, or Kinmen, is a tiny, barren archipelago consisting mainly of Greater Quemoy and Lesser Quemoy, totaling a mere fifty-nine square miles. In October 1949 there were only about forty thousand residents on the islands.<sup>1</sup> The most striking feature of Quemoy lies not in its size but in its extreme geographical proximity to the PRC mainland—only six miles away from the metropolis of Xiamen (Amoy), which was in 1949 the second-largest city in Fujian Province and had a population of over two hundred thousand. It is important to point out that Xiamen Island (now connected to the mainland, on which part of the city stands) is merely one mile from the Chinese mainland and would be the primary spot to assemble troops and amphibious vessels for any attempt to invade Taiwan.

But Quemoy controls the sea access in and out of Xiamen and the adjacent coastal areas (see the map). For the Nationalist (Kuomintang, or KMT) government, which was in rapid strategic retreat to Taiwan, Quemoy assumed supreme strategic importance to its own survival, because it could effectively frustrate the PLA's vowed intention to invade and take Taiwan.<sup>2</sup>

By the summer of 1949, the Chinese Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists had been raging for over three years and the Nationalists were near total defeat all across China. By late July it was beyond any doubt that the escape destination for the Nationalist government would be Taiwan. As a result, massive transportation of assets and government functions from the mainland to Taiwan began in full. Also that month the KMT's leader, Chiang Kai-shek, started to prepare for a pivotal battle to hold Quemoy, which was not even fortified at the time. Although nearby Xiamen Island was much more important in



a political and psychological sense, Quemoy would be more crucial militarily, because it could control all maritime assets in and access to the area, including Xiamen. So from the beginning Chiang Kai-shek was prepared to lose Xiamen but determined to keep Quemoy at any cost. He deployed the KMT's 22nd Army to garrison Quemoy, with about twenty thousand troops, in addition to a tank battalion with twenty-one American-made M5A1 Stuart tanks, each of which had a rapid-fire 47 mm gun. The Stuart tanks would play a pivotal role.

For three days, between 25 and 27 October, a battle for Quemoy raged. Invading PLA troops were greatly outnumbered, and the fighting was desperate on both sides. In the end, however, the PLA suffered a devastating defeat, one that shocked its high command. The entire three PLA regiments committed—9,086 men in all, including 350 local fishermen conscripted as captains of transport craft—were annihilated. About five thousand were killed, and the rest were captured as prisoners of war.<sup>3</sup>

### WAS THE SHORTAGE OF TRANSPORT SHIPS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FIASCO?

There is no doubt that a severe shortage of troop transports was a key factor in deciding the outcome of the battle of Quemoy. But the problem was not just a lack of vessels but poor planning and hostility from local residents.

The transport shortage had much to do with faulty planning by the PLA commanders. From the beginning, an attack on Xiamen had outweighed all other offensives along the Fujian coast, greatly diminishing any meaningful preparation for the planned assault on Quemoy. The mission of taking Xiamen and Quemoy



was handed to the PLA 3rd Field Army's 10th Army, under the command of a battle-hardened general, Ye Fei. He divided his three corps into two task forces. The 29th and 31st Corps would take on Xiamen. These corps were more offensively oriented and much better equipped than the smaller and weaker 28th Corps, which would take on Quemoy, then considered less important than Xiamen. The original plan was that the two task forces would launch simultaneous assaults on the KMT defenders of both Xiamen and Quemoy.

But doing so would require the two task forces to commandeer a large number of fishing vessels from local villages as troop transports. The commanding general of the 10th Army, General Ye, believed that many fishing vessels in the region were being systematically destroyed by KMT planes to avoid their being used by the advancing Communist troops.<sup>4</sup> But Ye's memoir does not provide any evidence of such bombing or instances when it occurred. On the contrary, most damage to and losses of commandeered fishing vessels were caused by storms during a minor island offensive prior to the attacks on Xiamen and Quemoy.<sup>5</sup> In his memoir Ye Fei contradicts himself, stating that in the island battles immediately prior to the battle of Quemoy not a single transport ship was lost to enemy planes and that this was taken as a welcome sign that the KMT might not use planes at Quemoy either.<sup>6</sup>

The primary reason for the lack of fishing vessels was that local fishermen were generally hostile to the Communist troops in the area. The biggest sector of the economy in the region was fishing, and the most important asset for a fisherman was his boat. Most fishermen resisted the PLA demand to surrender their vessels as troop transports. They hid their vessels or scuttled them to avoid their being taken over by the PLA troops.<sup>7</sup> General Xiao Feng, the on-scene, operational commander in the Quemoy battle, would recall in his own memoir that "fishermen in this coastal area either abandoned their fishing vessels and fled from us, or took their vessels with them and hid them; others even deliberately destroyed their fishing vessels to avoid being commandeered by us. We could not find the vessels when we found the fishermen; or we could not find the fishermen to operate these vessels when we found the vessels."<sup>8</sup>

Because of the shortage of transport ships, the original plan to attack Xiamen and Quemoy simultaneously was abandoned. The new plan was to attack Xiamen first, concentrating all the ships and boats already commandeered by the 10th Army, and to postpone the campaign against Quemoy until the Xiamen campaign was over and the ships and boats used in it could be released.

The battle for Xiamen started on 15 October and lasted two full days. The battle had something expected and something unexpected. The "expected" was the outcome, a smashing victory over demoralized defenders, who did not put up a real fight. Some twenty-seven thousand KMT soldiers were either killed



or captured, the majority of the originally stationed defenders having fled on ships to either Taiwan or other outlying islands still under KMT control. The unexpected result of the Xiamen campaign was devastating losses of transport vessels. After the Xiamen campaign, what remained for the 28th Corps to use in its upcoming Quemoy assault was fewer than three hundred small fishing boats, none motorized.

The battle plan for Quemoy was to land twenty thousand PLA troops on the island's beaches. But with fewer than three hundred small boats available, the task force would have to be transported in two groups. The first would be three PLA regiments, or about 8,700 troops, in addition to the 350 fishermen, most of them unwilling to serve the PLA but having no choice. The plan contemplated that once the first landing group reached the beachhead, the vessels would return to the PLA positions to take the second landing group, which would consist of four regiments, another eleven thousand troops. PLA intelligence estimated that there were about twenty thousand KMT defenders on Quemoy at the time and that the combined invasion force, twenty thousand PLA soldiers, would reach parity in strength, one to one. Given the PLA's superior morale and fighting spirit, victory over the defeatist and demoralized KMT defenders on Quemoy would be inevitable.<sup>9</sup>

But the plan went badly. After the first three regiments were delivered to the beachhead—in the middle of the night, apparently undetected by the defenders—the tide went out, and all the ships grounded in the shoals, where they were mercilessly destroyed by the KMT defenders by shore, sea, and air. Not a single ship or boat was able to return to pick up the reinforcing second landing group. Although grave miscalculation of ocean tides was later blamed by most participants and PRC historians as the chief culprit for the transport debacle, it was not the most decisive factor in the failure of the transport vessels to return for the second group.

Ignoring advice from local fishermen, the PLA commanders on board the vessels had ordered the vessels to approach the shore as closely as possible so that the invasion troops would have an easier walk to the beach. The vessels arrived at high tide, between 0130 and 0200 (1:30 and 2:00 AM), passing over underwater antiship obstacles and ship-snatching barbed wire. When the tide began to recede, some vessels became entangled with the newly exposed obstacles. PLA commanders realized the danger and ordered the swift return of the vessels to deeper water before the tide got too low. But it was too late; all of them became stuck on a long stretch of beach in a scene of total chaos.<sup>10</sup> When a land mine near the landing beach was accidentally ignited by a KMT patrol, the explosion triggered feverish searchlight sweeps by the coastal defenses, which discovered the shambles of landing vessels stuck on and near the beach.<sup>11</sup> Gunfire and bombing

erupted and lasted for more than two hours. Dawn, when it arrived, allowed KMT B-25 bombers and warships to shell the hapless landing forces, destroying all of them. Not a single vessel escaped.<sup>12</sup> The entire Quemoy battle plan, which hinged critically on the ability of the transport vessels to return to pick up eleven thousand more PLA troops, had turned into a complete fiasco.

### **WAS THE PLA'S LACK OF NAVAL POWER AND AIRPOWER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FIASCO?**

In his memoir, Ye Fei, the officer in overall charge of the battle of Quemoy, blames the PLA's lack of naval power and airpower during the battle for the defeat. "The most important and most salient lesson [for the defeat at Quemoy] was that at the time, the Chiang Kai-shek army had a navy and an air force, which remained basically intact during the War of National Liberation [the Civil War, 1946–49]; while our army did not have a navy and an air force, which forced us to cross the sea to fight by way of sailboats, without air cover, without naval support from the sea."<sup>13</sup> So states Ye Fei, and his argument seems reasonable on the surface. However, a careful scrutiny will reveal that his summary of the reasons for the defeat is without merit.

During the battle of Quemoy, the KMT had at its disposal twenty-five B-25 light bombers and about fifty FB-26 fighter-bombers.<sup>14</sup> The PLA had a squadron of P-51 Mustangs, captured from the KMT, but these pursuit planes had been used in the ceremonial extravaganza in Beijing marking the founding of the People's Republic of China in early October. They were still in North China.<sup>15</sup> On the naval side, the KMT had a total of nine ships, mostly small patrol vessels and light frigates.

During the battle, the PLA command was fully aware of these KMT naval and air assets and took measures to deny their usefulness. The most important decision made by Ye Fei, in this connection, and his subordinate Xiao Feng—and it was a correct one—was to conduct the amphibious assault at night, because the KMT air force did not have a nighttime capability. Also, with the cover of night the PLA troops could avoid being detected by the KMT warships and so launch a surprise attack. On both accounts the PLA command was right, and the invasion troops did successfully avoid attack by KMT air or naval assets during the entire trip to the beaches on the first night of the battle. In addition, the PLA mounted a battery of eighty pieces of artillery on nearby Dadeng Island.<sup>16</sup> Though not overwhelming, these guns could silence the KMT's small patrol boats during the landing phase.

Ye Fei's argument is even less plausible if one considers the many amphibious battles the PLA launched against even more dominant KMT sea and air superiority, notably at Hainan Island some six months later. In virtually all these other

instances, despite overwhelming KMT naval and air superiority, the PLA island assaults prevailed.

What General Ye neglected to point out in his memoir is another key reason for the Quemoy defeat—the fatefully delayed departure of the invasion forces. It was less than six miles from the PLA embarkation points to the Quemoy beaches. Under the weather conditions at the time, a favorably robust northeast breeze, it would take less than one hour to reach the destination. The invasion forces were accordingly ordered to board the vessels around 1900 (seven o'clock) on the evening of 24 October. But indecision on the part of Ye Fei and Xiao Feng and command ambiguity between them, in addition to utterly chaotic boarding and loading procedures, delayed the departure by several hours, greatly shortening the period of darkness, the window during which the KMT air and sea forces could not attack. Most of the vessels did not sail until after midnight.<sup>17</sup>

The armada itself was also disorganized. The three regiments set sail from three different spots. Once entering open water, their vessels were to rendezvous at a designated area and then proceed together. This order wasted about an hour. Worse, because of radio silence to avoid enemy detection, the vessels had no communications with each other. As a result, the rendezvous was never really completed; the vessels swarmed to Quemoy without any coordination or unified command, arriving intermittently between 0130 and 0200, far later than originally planned, with only three or four hours left within which to land their troops.

Given that delay, even if all three hundred transport vessels had returned to the rear echelon and picked up the eleven thousand men of the second group, they would most likely have been annihilated. The most important element of a victory—that is, inability of the KMT forces to attack by air or sea—would have been lost with the advent of daylight on 25 October.

We can then safely conclude that Ye Fei's theory about the primary reason for the Quemoy fiasco is incorrect.

### **WAS INTELLIGENCE FAILURE CRUCIAL FOR THE FIASCO?**

Before the assault was launched on 24 October, the PLA commanders gathered a substantial amount of intelligence on the enemy and the target area. Reports poured into the command headquarters of General Ye, the overall commander, and of Xiao Feng, the operational commander. These reports were generally classified as either political or operational intelligence. In both categories the PLA commanders fundamentally misjudged the intelligence in front of them and made seriously flawed decisions that doomed the entire invasion.

Political intelligence had been the PLA's forte, as it dealt with timely and accurate assessment of the enemy's will to fight. Yet both commanders erred gravely in the Quemoy assault. Their overall assessments of the Quemoy defenders were

more romantic than professional. They believed deeply that the KMT's 22nd Army on Quemoy was morbidly defeatist and incompetent, ready to flee at the sight of the PLA invaders. "Landing on the beach of Quemoy is victory itself" was the watchword given to many PLA units in the operation.<sup>18</sup> So pervasive was the assumption of the enemy's lack of will to fight that the transports carrying the primary assault regiment contained large amounts of cash in several heavy chests for the use of celebrating the "liberation of Quemoy" in an extravaganza planned for the next day. Several other larger ships were loaded with live pigs and with office furniture to be used by the new local government to be run by communist cadres.<sup>19</sup>

To be fair, this was not the problem of only PLA commanders in Fujian Province at the time. Rao Shushi, the political commissar of the PLA's 3rd Field Army, which was in charge of the entire East China region, was hopelessly contemptuous, on the eve of the battle, of the KMT troops' will to fight. "Rao Shushi developed a 'mentality of underestimating the enemy,'" later recalled Marshal Chen Yi, who commanded the 3rd Field Army. "He believed that once our troops landed on the beach, enemies on Quemoy would surrender without fighting. All we needed was to send in one or two divisions to attack, the Quemoy problem would be solved."<sup>20</sup>

But the PLA commanders' estimate of the enemy's will to fight was wrong. Admittedly, the KMT troops were indeed a ragtag bunch. The 22nd Army, then stationed at Quemoy, was under the command of a general named Li Liangrong. Li and his troops were not Chiang Kai-shek's favorites, and they were generally underequipped and undertrained. But General Li made these troops into a formidable fighting force that displayed tenacity and ruthlessness in the three-day battle.

First of all, Li was given substantial reinforcement at the crucial time. Chiang Kai-shek realized Li's inadequacy in troop strength and redeployed, swiftly and sub rosa, one of his best units, the 18th Army, totaling twenty thousand troops, to Quemoy. Arriving before and during the battle, these troops greatly boosted the morale of General Li's men. The determination of this ragtag but spirited army, however, was already extraordinarily high, in part because of an utter hatred of the communists.

A recent popular writing in mainland China by a high-level PLA general tells a revealing story, one that explains the abject hatred of General Li's men for PLA soldiers and the ruthlessness of Quemoy's defenders. It relates to the battle of Xiamen, fought several miles away immediately prior to the battle for Quemoy. The PLA won that battle, during which many KMT soldiers took off their uniforms and hid as civilians in residential neighborhoods. The PLA commander in Xiamen ordered cars to broadcast via loudspeakers promises of leniency and safe

repatriation to Taiwan if they came out and surrendered. Within hours, hundreds of KMT officers and soldiers answered the propaganda and emerged from hiding. They were rounded up by PLA troops at the harbor. After dusk, they were machine-gunned, execution-style.<sup>21</sup> Fear and outrage generated by incidents like this permeated the 22nd Army on Quemoy, and General Li adroitly used such psychology to instill in his troops despair and ruthlessness—the very essence of a formidable enemy.<sup>22</sup>

If PLA political intelligence was inaccurate, tactical and operational intelligence was not much better. General Ye Fei was never clear about exactly how many defenders there were on Quemoy. He believed there were no more than twenty thousand; further, he estimated at the time, “Li Liangrong’s 22nd Army was nothing but maimed soldiers and defeated generals [残兵败将].” He was completely fooled by a KMT deception plan. Chiang meant to hold on to Quemoy at any cost, and as noted, he had reinforced it with his crack force, the 18th Army, under the able Hu Lian. But even more important, Chiang ordered the armada carrying General Hu’s troops to land secretly on the rocky south side of Quemoy Island, opposite the anticipated PLA landing strips on the north and northwest sides. Unbeknownst to Ye Fei, by 24 October, when the PLA launched the assault, half of Hu’s twenty thousand troops were already on the island. The other half was struggling to land safely through heavy waves; they succeeded after the battle started.

This intelligence would have been crucial. Had General Ye known of it, he would never have ordered the attack. The PLA force would have been greatly outnumbered, in a ratio of less than one to two, even if all his planned troops had been able to land at once, which would not be the case. In the end, the actual PLA/KMT troop ratio during the battle was one to five.<sup>23</sup> Faulty intelligence led General Ye to believe that he could reach troop parity on Quemoy if he could land close to twenty thousand soldiers. Ye’s landing plan was to be utterly invalidated and disastrous, but in the meantime he was so confident in this parity that he refused to consider any alternatives even when newly acquired evidence pointed to the strong possibility that the enemy had already been reinforced by the entire twenty-thousand-man 18th Army.

On 14 October, ten days before the order was given to invade Quemoy, General Xiao, the PLA operational commander of the battle of Quemoy, received a shocking piece of intelligence. Two KMT officers belonging to Hu Lian’s 18th Army, captured in an unrelated skirmish, had revealed that the whole 11th Division of that army had landed on Quemoy five days earlier.<sup>24</sup> General Xiao immediately reported this crucial piece of intelligence to his superior, General Ye, who dismissed it as bunk.<sup>25</sup> Frustrated by Ye’s intransigence, Xiao did something daring—he managed to report his concern to Ye’s superior, General Su Yu, the

deputy commander for operations for the 3rd Field Army. General Su had been designated by Mao Zedong as the overall planner for a quick invasion of Taiwan, fulfilling Mao's vow "to carry the Revolution to the ultimate end."

Alarmed by the Quemoy situation, Su issued an instruction, now famous in the Chinese military, known as the "three conditions for calling off the Quemoy campaign." That is, the attack on Quemoy should be called off if one of the following three conditions existed: first, if the enemy augmented the island defending force by more than one regiment; second, if there were not enough transports to carry six regiments at one time; or third, if there were not at least six thousand pro-Communist, politically reliable boat handlers available from the old "Liberated Area" of northern Jiangsu and Shandong, nearly a thousand miles north of Fujian.<sup>26</sup>

But General Ye did not heed Su's instructions and bullheadedly went on with his attack plan. Nevertheless, Ye sensed General Xiao's lack of enthusiasm in light of the mounting difficulties of attacking Quemoy. On 18 October, six days before the battle began, he spent nearly three hours with General Xiao and Xiao's commissar, General Li Mancun, trying to dispel their doubts and eventually ordering them to launch the earliest possible attack.<sup>27</sup>

But Xiao and Li Mancun were still not persuaded. "I raised the issue to my superior of the 10th Army," Xiao recounted in his memoir, "that . . . we did not know how many enemy reinforcements had arrived at Quemoy, which made the preparation for the invasion of Quemoy inadequate and it would be difficult to launch an early assault on Quemoy."<sup>28</sup> But General Ye and his headquarters staff would have none of this. "My superiors at the 10th Army all replied to me by saying that the 28th Corps should resolutely implement the 10th Army headquarters' order to seize the battlefield advantage to launch an earliest possible invasion to liberate Quemoy," Xiao Feng would bitterly recall.<sup>29</sup> As to what exactly the "battlefield advantage" was, General Ye declared with relish, "The enemies defending Quemoy have already become frightened by us, like birds scared by the mere twang of a bowstring [惊弓之鸟]."

On 20 October, four days before the battle began, General Xiao, still spooked by uncertainty about enemy troop strength on Quemoy, again requested General Ye to postpone the operation.<sup>30</sup> Ye was not amused by the new request and denied it with alacrity. However, two days later, on 22 October, new intelligence reports came to General Xiao that another division of Hu Lian's 18th Army had just appeared in waters off Quemoy. General Xiao immediately reported to Ye, hoping that a delay of action would be approved.<sup>31</sup>

Incredibly, General Ye interpreted the intelligence the wrong way. He picked up the phone and personally told Xiao that the intention of the KMT force near Quemoy was not clear and that the PLA attack should be hurried, before General

Hu's troops could land.<sup>32</sup> We now know that General Ye was completely out of the picture with regard to Hu's reinforcements. Not only had one of Hu's divisions landed on Quemoy days earlier, but the division reported to be on the sea was just waiting for the choppy seas to calm in order to land, which happened within hours.

General Xiao, still unwilling to take the risk of attacking, stated that he could not possibly proceed with the operation the next day as ordered and requested a one-day delay, until 24 October. Ye Fei finally agreed, and the operation was thus set for the 24th. Incredibly, though, in granting the delay, Ye told Xiao that "according to various intelligence reports, there had been no reinforcement of enemy's troops in Quemoy, which was only at 12,000 troops strong."<sup>33</sup> In fact, at the time, there were more than thirty thousand KMT troops on Quemoy.

The departure for the invasion was set at night, to avoid naval and air raids. Three regiments from General Xiao's 28th Corps boarded the nearly three hundred small fishing boats being used as transports between 6 and 7 PM, ready to set sail to attack Quemoy. Around 8 PM, however, Xiao received a revised intelligence report from 10th Army headquarters in Xiamen that the KMT 18th Army had just landed a regiment on the south side of Quemoy. However, 10th Army directed that General Ye's order to attack Quemoy that evening was not to be changed—instead, Xiao's troops were to race to reach Quemoy ahead of the rest of Hu Lian's force.

But General Xiao, shocked by the new report, immediately ordered all three of his regiments, on board and ready to set sail, to stand fast. He placed an urgent call to the 10th Army headquarters in Xiamen and requested that the entire attack plan be called off until more intelligence on enemy's troop strength could be ascertained and more transports could be commandeered. But General Ye was nowhere to be found. Answering General Xiao's urgent call was Liu Peishan, Ye's deputy commissar and political director, who rejected Xiao's request. General Xiao later recalled, "I clearly stated to Liu on the phone that we [should] halt the attack plan, wait for clarification on the true situations of the enemy, obtain more transport ships before we take action. Hearing that, Director Liu only said, 'Proceed according to the original plan, the decision shall not be changed.' Then he hung up the phone."<sup>34</sup>

Around midnight, the invading armada set sail for Quemoy. It arrived an hour and a half later, and the epic battle began.

### WAS COMMAND CHAOS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FIASCO?

In the aftermath of the disastrous defeat, Xiao Feng went to his superior, Ye Fei, and asked to be punished for the defeat. Ye replied that it was he himself who should be punished for the infamy at Quemoy. General Ye promptly drafted a



lengthy cable to his superior, General Su Yu at the 3rd Field Army, asking for punishment. Su, however, rejected Ye's request and instead cabled Mao Zedong directly asking that he, Su, be punished, for his failure to ensure victory. Mao, the supreme leader of the Communist forces in China, rejected General Su's request, saying essentially that nobody should be punished. "The loss at Quemoy is not a matter of punishment," Mao declared. "Instead, it's a matter of learning a lesson from it."<sup>35</sup>

All this is telling, because it reflects the kind of command chaos that existed before and during the battle of Quemoy. No one was responsible for command integrity or organizational coordination.

The 10th Army commander, General Ye Fei, had been born in the Philippines of Chinese parents from the Fujian area. Ye, who had joined the communists seventeen years earlier as a young man of no social or political distinction, had returned to his hometown as a glorious conqueror and wartime leader of over 120,000 troops.<sup>36</sup> When Ye captured the picturesque metropolis of Xiamen, he promptly moved his headquarters to the city, immersing himself in urban life and acting more like a mayor than a military commander with battles still raging in his area.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the moment Ye moved into Xiamen he sent for his mother, who had been living in rural Fujian, moving her into his headquarters to share the euphoria and glory.<sup>38</sup>

For the remaining, and militarily more daunting, task of taking Quemoy, General Ye designated the weakest of his three corps, the 28th Corps. However, in late August 1949 the 28th Corps's longtime commander, General Zhu Shaoqing, had suffered a stomach illness and was now in Shanghai, newly captured from the KMT, for medical treatment. The political commissar of the 28th Corps, General Chen Meizao, was in a hospital in Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian Province, enjoying the ease of urban life. In addition, the 28th Corps's longtime chief of staff, Wu Shu, had been reassigned without replacement. General Ye then appointed Zhu Shaoqing's deputy commander, a staff general named Xiao Feng, to command the 28th Corps, without a deputy commander or a chief of staff.<sup>39</sup>

The first invasion group was to consist of three regiments. However, as General Ye ordered, only two would come from the 28th Corps; the third would come from another corps, the 29th, also under Ye's command. This was done mainly so that the 29th Corps could share the anticipated glory of victory at Quemoy. But mixing troops from competing units confused the organic command structure of the 28th Corps.<sup>40</sup> Also, there was some rivalry between the 28th Corps and 29th Corps, and there had been ill feeling in the competition to commandeer local fishing vessels.<sup>41</sup>

General Ye realized the potential for rivalry among the three hurriedly mixed regiments, but his response, rather inexplicably, was that there should be no

overall commander for the entire invasion force. The three regimental commanders were to act with equal command authority, with individual battle plans; Xiao Feng was to stay in the rear echelon listening to their radio reports once the battle started.<sup>42</sup> To achieve the element of surprise, however, as we have seen, radio silence was ordered while the armada of wooden sailing vessels was on its way. So there was absolutely no communication among vessels during the entire landing process, which further aggravated the command problem.

In the event, the most deadly weapons used by the KMT defenders against the invading PLA troops and vessels were the twenty-one M5A1 Stuart tanks. The PLA command had known about the tanks beforehand and had prepared antitank rockets to deal with them. But the antitank rockets came in three parts, which needed to be assembled before launch. General Xiao ordered the parts carried by separate ships. When the force attempted to land and came under fierce and devastating tank fire, none of the antitank rockets could be assembled.<sup>43</sup>

#### WAS THE BATTLE OF QUEMOY A “TURNING POINT” IN HISTORY?

Mao Zedong admitted that the battle of Quemoy was the biggest loss to the PLA during the Chinese Civil War.<sup>44</sup> Three regiments of PLA troops were completely wiped out by the KMT, in utter contrast to the military zeitgeist of the time, when the Nationalist army as a whole was in an avalanche of retreat and defeat. In the annals of the Nationalists’ military history, the triumph at Quemoy, known in Taiwan as the battle of Guningtou Beach, marked a turning point, the final halting of the momentum of the PLA assault against Taiwan. It was the battle that saved the Republic of China; it was Chiang Kai-shek’s battle of Midway, turning the tide of history and sealing for the future the general pattern of the Cold War confrontation in Asia.

The KMT claim is not entirely without merit. The battle of Quemoy did indeed end the PLA’s amphibious attempts to capture the offshore islands. But far more importantly, Quemoy has since become a focal point and symbol of the epic struggle between communist and noncommunist forces in Asia. Metaphorically and realistically, the battle made the tiny island of Quemoy, just a few miles from Communist China, Asia’s West Berlin, triggering decades of military confrontations in and around it. In 1954 and 1958 the PLA launched major artillery bombardments almost bringing on a nuclear Armageddon by involving the United States and possibly the Soviet Union. Intermittent artillery bombardment on Quemoy, with real shells or pamphlets, would last for many years. They would not stop until 1 January 1979, when the United States abandoned its diplomatic recognition of Taipei and switched to Beijing as the legitimate government of “China.”

However, the PLA historian Xu Yan disputes the idea that the battle of Quemoy was really a turning point of anything:<sup>45</sup> “The defeat at Quemoy at the hands

of the KMT forces was only a small episode at the last stage of the PLA's strategic pursuit against the collapsing KMT regime[;] . . . it did not affect the strategic outcome of the war a bit" (p. 93). It is hard to disagree with Mr. Xu Yan. However, it should also be noted that the battle of Quemoy had an unintended strategic consequence that few could have realized at the time. That is, the utter shambles at Quemoy may have saved the PLA from an even bigger catastrophe known as the battle of Taiwan, which had been actively contemplated by the PLA high command, from Mao Zedong on down.

After the fiasco, Mao ordered the 3rd Field Army to prepare for an even larger invasion of Taiwan. The task fell on the shoulders of General Su Yu, the deputy commander for operations of the 3rd Field Army and the realist who had cautioned about the three conditions that should have invalidated any attack on Quemoy. Three weeks later, General Su, now the chairman of the Liberating Taiwan Working Committee, proceeded with specific planning for an invasion of Taiwan. On 20 November 1949 he laid out his plan to senior PLA commanders.<sup>46</sup>

The Quemoy lessons loomed large in Su Yu's plan. By mid-December he had become the leading voice of reason and calm, realistically assessing the difficulties of an amphibious invasion of Taiwan. He reported to Mao Zedong several times his concerns and cautions. That might not have gained him favor from the triumphalist chairman, then getting ready to travel to Moscow to meet Joseph Stalin and take charge of "making revolutions" in Asia while the Soviet Union occupied itself with Western and Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, on 17 December Su Yu officially postponed the date for invading Taiwan.<sup>47</sup>

General Ye Fei may have left the best summary of this point. "In the early 1950s, when our navy and air force were still inferior to the enemy, if we proceeded with wooden sailboats to liberate Taiwan by crossing the Taiwan Strait, we would have had an even bigger fiasco than the battle of Quemoy. After the defeat at Quemoy, we learned our lesson; our head became more clear and lucid. Perhaps the real significance of learning from the lessons and experience of our Quemoy operation lies exactly here."<sup>48</sup>

Yet the real significance of the battle of Quemoy goes beyond even this. The battle may be most important not in itself but in spite of itself. Its importance has something to do with what else was going on in the much larger international arena.

At the time, the Harry Truman administration in the United States had all but given up supporting the Chiang Kai-shek government. Two months before the battle of Quemoy, the White House approved a China white paper that largely blamed Chiang Kai-shek and his government for the loss of China to the Communists. Washington expected the defeat of the KMT army to be thorough and inevitable, including the loss of the island of Taiwan, although it had been heavily

built up by Chiang for the impending transfer of his government. The Nationalist general Sun Liren, the garrison commander of Taiwan and a favorite of the U.S. administration, reported to Washington by a separate channel in September 1949, a few weeks before Quemoy, that the PLA was capable of assembling an invading armada of a thousand vessels carrying two hundred thousand troops who would take over Taiwan within twenty-four hours.<sup>49</sup> The newly established Central Intelligence Agency too was thoroughly convinced that the PLA would take over Taiwan militarily by the end of 1950.<sup>50</sup>

But the battle of Quemoy changed all that. One week after the Nationalist victory at Quemoy and most likely in response to it, the Truman administration initiated contact with Chiang for the first time since 1948. The American consul general in Taipei officially informed Chiang on 3 November that the U.S. government would support his efforts toward reform and democracy in Taiwan.<sup>51</sup> This was an enormous morale boost for Chiang and his defeated government. He now for the first time had Washington's support for using Taiwan as a base from which he might stage a comeback to the mainland. It also marked the beginning of official American recognition of the Republic of China in Taiwan, which lasted until the 1970s.

Further, after the battle of Quemoy the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff adjusted, albeit with a certain subtlety, its military posture toward Chiang in Taiwan. The Joint Chiefs now suggested to the White House that limited military assistance be provided to the KMT troops in Taiwan, though it ruled out direct military involvement in Taiwan.<sup>52</sup> The momentum of readjustment by the United States in favor of the KMT government in Taiwan created by the battle of Quemoy, however nuanced and limited, would be given robust boosts by two other major international events: the outbreak of the Korean War less than eight months later and the loss of the U.S. monopoly on atomic bombs at the same time.

In this sense, the battle of Quemoy was not only a turning point for the Civil War that still remains unresolved across the Taiwan Strait but also the beginning of a chain of events that shaped the Cold War throughout Asia and the Pacific region for decades to come.

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#### NOTES

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1. Xu Yan, *The Battle of Quemoy* [徐焰, 金门之战, 中国广播电视出版社, 北京] (1992), pp. 47–48.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
3. Dangdai zhongguo de junshi gongzuo [当代中国的军事工作, 中国社会科学院出版社] (1989), p. 237; Xiao Feng, “My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy,” in *Recollections of the Amphibious Battle of Quemoy*, ed. Xiao Feng et al. [回顾金门之战, 载于萧锋, 李曼村等, 回顾金门登陆战, 人民出版社] (1994), p. 40; Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, p. 82; Liu Yazhou, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy* [金门战役检讨, 载于中国报道周刊] (20 April 2004), p. 12. There is little disagreement among mainland historians on the numbers of PLA soldiers who were killed. On the prisoner-of-war (POW) number, Xu Yan believes it should be around three thousand, while Liu Yazhou’s number is four thousand. It is likely that Xu confuses the actual number, which should be around four thousand, with the number of PLA POWs returned to mainland China between 1950 and 1956, which was around three thousand; see Liu, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy*, p. 12. The returned PLA POWs all became “nonpersons” in China and would suffer harsh treatments ranging from dishonorable discharge to prison terms—even outright execution—for being “traitors.” See Liu, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy*, p. 12, and Feizi Longxiang, “The Fate of Returned POWs Captured from the Battle of Quemoy” [飞子龙翔: 金门之战回归战俘的命运], *Feizi Longxiang’s Blog*, [zxy0808.bokee.com/](http://zxy0808.bokee.com/).
4. Ye Fei, *Ye Fei Memoir* [叶飞回忆录, 解放军出版社] (1988), p. 601.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 598–601.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 599.
7. Xiao, “My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy,” p. 23.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, pp. 44–47.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
12. Ye, *Ye Fei Memoir*, p. 604; Xiao, “My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy,” p. 33; Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, p. 66.
13. Ye, *Ye Fei Memoir*, p. 606.
14. Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, p. 61.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
18. Liu, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy*, p. 3.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, pp. 61–62.
24. Xiao, “My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy,” p. 23.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Su Yu was ensnared in a major political purge in 1958 and as the PLA’s Chief of Staff was a main target of a relentless “antidogmatism in military affairs” campaign engineered by his immediate superior, Marshal Peng Dehuai, Mao’s defense minister for much of the 1950s. A year later, in July 1959, Peng was purged in turn by Mao for opposing the chairman’s disastrous “Great Leap Forward” movement. In the 1980s, after Mao’s death, Peng was politically rehabilitated. But one cannot rehabilitate a victim of a rehabilitated PLA marshal; also, the chief henchman who carried out Peng’s “Struggling against Su Yu” campaign in 1958 was Deng Xiaoping, who essentially ruled China from 1978 until his death in 1997. As a result, positive spin in recent decades on Su Yu’s salient caution about the Quemoy battle, in the form of the “three conditions for calling off the Quemoy campaign,” generates intense, politically motivated internal debate among factions of the PLA. For such positive spin on Su Yu, see Xiao Feng, “Unforgettable Instructions,” in *The General of Our Generation: Remembering Comrade Su Yu* [萧锋, 难忘的教诲, 载于“一代名将: 回忆粟裕同志,” 上海人民出版社] (1986), p. 299; Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, pp. 89–90; and Liu, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy*, p. 4. For a negative view see Hong Xiaoxia, “Doubting and Investigating ‘The Three Conditions for Calling off the Quemoy Campaign’—and Assessing the Value of Memoirs as Historical Evidence,” *Journal of Modern History Studies* 3 (2002) [洪小夏《金门战斗“三不打”的质疑与考证—兼论回忆录的史料价值及其考辨》],

- 《近代史研究》, 2002年第3期], and Wang Hongguang, "An Inquiry into the 'Three Conditions for Calling off the Quemoy Campaign,'" *Journal of Military History* (November 2012) [王洪光, 对金门战役“三不打”的考证 《军事历史》 2012/11].
27. Ye, *Ye Fei Memoir*, pp. 600–601; Xiao, "My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy," p. 24.
  28. Xiao, "My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy," p. 24.
  29. *Ibid.*
  30. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
  31. *Ibid.*
  32. *Ibid.*
  33. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
  34. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.
  35. Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, p. 91; Ye, *Ye Fei Memoir*, p. 606.
  36. Liu, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy*, pp. 2–3.
  37. Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, pp. 597–98.
  38. Liu, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy*, pp. 2–3.
  39. Xiao, "My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy," p. 16.
  40. Liu, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy*, pp. 3–4.
  41. Ye, *Ye Fei Memoir*, p. 600.
  42. Xiao Feng was originally designated the overall commander and told to accompany the invasion troops, but hours before the departure of the armada General Ye's headquarters ordered him to stay behind; Xiao, "My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy," p. 29. Xiao also recalls in his memoir that he designated a division commander, Zhong Xianwen, to be the overall commander of the three regiments and asked him to go to Quemoy with the first invasion group. But, according to Xiao, Zhong's flagship was commandeered by one of the three regiment commanders as a troop transport (p. 33). This is quite implausible, because a regiment commander could not possibly commandeer a division commander's flagship. If this did indeed happen, it further testifies to the miserable command chaos suffered by the 28th Corps in the hands of an incompetent, understaffed, and weak corps commander.
  43. Liu, *Examination of the Campaign of Quemoy*, p. 8.
  44. Mao Zedong to key PLA field army commanders, 29 October 1949, in Xiao, "My Recollection of the Battle of Quemoy," p. 42.
  45. Xu, *Battle of Quemoy*, pp. 92–93.
  46. *The Chronicle of Su Yu's Life* [粟裕年谱] (Jiangsu Party History Work Office, Contemporary China, 2006), pp. 487–89.
  47. *Ibid.*
  48. Ye, *Ye Fei Memoir*, p. 608.
  49. Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo's Son: Chiang Ching-kuo and the Revolutions in China and Taiwan*, Chinese ed. (Beijing: Huawen, 2010), p. 156.
  50. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
  51. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
  52. *Ibid.*, pp. 159–60.

## NATIONAL INTEREST AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ADMIRAL ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

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*Thomas F. X. Varacalli*

The political thought of Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan was a response to two particular waves of American progressivism. Social Darwinism, the first wave, in its most secular, conservative, and unadulterated form, claimed that the human race is constantly progressing, that the survival of the fittest is embedded in the historical unfolding of history, and that morality is conditioned by the contingencies of one's historical epoch. Social Darwinism led to an emphasis on human selfishness, competition, and the following of one's interest.<sup>1</sup> The second wave, influenced by a variety of factors including Kantian ethics, European social policies, and the American Social Gospel, focused on the more positive aspects of progressivism. The state, according to this worldview, existed to better the world and to promote moral responsibility in both the domestic and international spheres.<sup>2</sup> Herbert Croly, one of the most influential progressive thinkers, believed that "the promise of American life" could be achieved through various internal social, political, moral, economic, and constitutional reforms that would both redress a perceived loss of individual liberty and further the common good.<sup>3</sup>

Mahan combined both of these strands of American progressivism to provide his country a new and reinvigorated foreign policy. Nations, Mahan argued, had

to be self-interested. The United States needed to protect itself from the possibility of European encroachment against the Monroe Doctrine. Unlike many of his contemporary social Darwinists, however, Mahan balanced his emphasis on interest

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with a genuine concern for moral responsibility. The United States had a duty not only to ensure its national interest but also to improve and better the world. American armament, for example, not only protected the United States from foreign encroachment but protected the sovereignty of South America from European imperialism—an objective distinct from national interest. American armament, therefore, promoted a moral tenet: the right of South American nations to self-determination.

Mahan was not a comprehensive thinker. By profession he was a historian and essayist. His comments and ideas about progressivism are sporadic, peppered throughout writings concerning particular moments of history or specific policy issues. Mahan never created any overarching theory about the interplay of national interest and moral responsibility. The absence of any grand theory is intentional: Mahan, like his most important intellectual source, baron de Jomini, made universal claims only through the study of particular situations. Examining multiple historical and contemporary events, Mahan emphasized the supremacy of national interest in American foreign policy, but he balanced this position with a genuine concern for moral responsibility. Although America had to follow its own interests, Mahan argued, he never advocated any action or social policy that he believed to be evil.

Progressive expansionist tendencies did not begin with Mahan, but he was one of the best exponents of this outward movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>4</sup> The uniqueness of Mahan's thought stemmed from his integration of thorough strategic and military knowledge, shrewd political analysis, and the academic vigor of two burgeoning fields of his time, economics and history. Mahan's career as an intellectual began with his study of sea power, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783* (1890), which was based on the lectures he delivered as President of the newly founded Naval War College. Although *Influence of Sea Power* is largely a technical and terse account of sea power, its most celebrated parts—the introduction and first chapter—provide an outline of his political philosophy. Nations, he argues there, are concerned primarily with their own survival. They follow their own interests, creating a competitive international environment based predominantly on force and strategic calculation. They employ various forms of coercion, including outright war, to pursue their interests. The study of history, Mahan holds, demonstrates that the development of sea power is one of the most influential elements in the forming of a great nation.<sup>5</sup>

Mahan's concept of sea power was broader than the mere military possession of a navy. Rather, for him "sea power" was an economic term, one that explained how a nation became dominant at sea, in three steps: the production of goods,

the building of a navy to protect and transport these goods, and the creation of colonies, which provided the raw materials necessary to produce more goods while simultaneously creating other markets for trade.<sup>6</sup> Sea power, then, was fundamentally tied to expanding economic markets. For nations such as the United States to grow in influence, they had to expand economically as well as militarily.

The political implications of Mahan's thought—the centrality of national interest in international affairs, the reality of competition, the imperative to maintain a strong home market and economy, the importance of strategic military and naval force, the necessity of constant economic and military expansion, and the benefits of colonialism—were not lost on Mahan's contemporaries. *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, as well as its acclaimed sequel, *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793–1812* (1892), produced a significant splash on both sides of the Atlantic. Many Europeans were enamored of *Influence of Sea Power upon History* because they thought it defended their own nations' policies on armament and imperialism. It was translated into several languages and placed in all the naval ships and schools of Germany and Japan.<sup>7</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm owned two copies of the book, one in English and the other in German, and claimed that he was "trying to learn it by heart."<sup>8</sup> In Great Britain, Mahan received an audience with Queen Victoria and honorary doctorates from Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>9</sup> The nation that most effectively employed Mahan's ideas, however, was Japan. Several Japanese theorists, such as Akiyama Saneyuki and Sato Tetsutaro, read Mahan religiously. Many of Mahan's books were translated into Japanese.<sup>10</sup> In America the book's reception was a bit less sensational, except in the Republican Party. The William McKinley administration picked Mahan, by then retired, to serve on a board formed to advise on naval strategy during the Spanish-American War and, then in peace, as a delegate to the first Hague conference, where he was noted as the only representative to vote against the ban on asphyxiating gas in war.<sup>11</sup>

Owing to Mahan's forty-year naval career, the subject matter of his histories, his philosophical emphasis on the competition of nations, and his staunch opposition to arbitration, his name has become synonymous with the promotion of war, force, and imperialism. This unfavorable association began with several of his contemporaries. The noted British pacifist Norman Angell considered Mahan's political thought "a doctrine of savagery."<sup>12</sup> Charles Beard, in a sensational piece, characterized Mahan as a "bookish" manufacturer of American imperialism and one of "the four . . . most powerful agitators that ever affected any nation."<sup>13</sup> A generation later, Richard Hofstadter dismissed Mahan, claiming that "[Mahan] believed that every nation like every schoolboy was bound to come to

blows with its fellows.”<sup>14</sup> By midcentury, many historians had labeled Mahan a social Darwinist.<sup>15</sup>

These interpretations not only are uncharitable but purvey a certain caricature of Mahan’s political thought. It is true that Mahan was not afraid to use force to protect American interests. In his books, essays, and articles, he supported the annexation of Hawaii, the creation of the canal across the Central American isthmus, the Open Door policy in China, the Spanish-American War, the taking of Cuba, the colonization of the Philippines, and increases in naval armament. Above all, Mahan urged his countrymen to uphold the Monroe Doctrine. Mahan defended these positions primarily as imperatives of national interest. On several key issues, however, Mahan entwined his position with a moral responsibility that he perceived Western nations to have with respect to non-Western nations. That emphasis on moral responsibility, which many of Mahan’s critics either flatly ignore or dismiss as ethnocentric cultural and religious imperialism, is pivotal to an understanding of the depth and balance of Mahan’s political thought. Mahan is neither Hofstadter’s rambunctious schoolboy nor Beard’s trigger-happy imperialist. He did not desire war for its own sake. In fact, he thought that various elements of his political thought, such as economic reciprocity, military and naval armament, and the European balance of powers, would help reduce the likelihood of war.<sup>16</sup>

At first glance, it may seem that national interest and moral responsibility are incompatible, in that the former deals with the appetites while the latter focuses on morality. Mahan attempted to wed these two concepts by claiming that the ultimate arbiter of both national interest and moral responsibility is the nation itself. Nations, he argued, are sovereign and independent. As there is no universal and impartial arbiter of justice, every nation has the right to form its own subjective understanding of moral responsibility. Only the individual nation is able to decide whether its policy is based on national interest, moral responsibility, or a combination of both. Even when a nation realizes that it has made an error in policy judgment, it is better that it err than allow another nation or arbiter to decide what is moral or in the interest of that nation. Ultimately, the radical subjectivity and nationalism of Mahan’s thought make his distinction between national interest and moral responsibility less apparent and self-evident than Mahan seems to have intended. In principle, however, there remains a substantive difference between interest and responsibility: in the latter, perceived charity and beneficence are offered to non-Americans. Mahan, though, did not provide an example in which national interest is absent from acts of moral responsibility. Recognition of the interaction in his political thought between national interest and moral responsibility is important in any evaluation of his public-policy positions.

## THE NATURE OF NATIONS: COMPETITION AND THE PURSUIT OF NATIONAL INTEREST

There is little evidence that Mahan was exposed to the classics of Western political thought. In the over two thousand personal letters that have been collected and published by his most recent biographer, Mahan did not comment on Niccolò Machiavelli, Hugo Grotius, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, or Karl Marx.<sup>17</sup> These thinkers were absent also from his published work, although he did quote Montesquieu on the importance of commercial monopolies.<sup>18</sup> Rather, Mahan's thought was influenced primarily by the military strategist baron de Jomini, by various works of nineteenth-century high Anglican theology recommended by his uncle Milo Mahan, and by a vast array of political and military historians, ranging from Thucydides and Plutarch to Leopold von Ranke and François Guizot.<sup>19</sup> It was his study of history that specifically led him to develop his sea-power thesis. Mahan recounts in his autobiography how, while reading an account of the Carthaginian Hannibal's failed Second Punic War campaign in Theodor Mommsen's *History of Rome*, he came to understand the historical importance of the navy: "It suddenly struck me . . . how different things might have been could Hannibal have invaded by the sea, as the Romans often had Africa, instead of the long land route."<sup>20</sup> From this insight, Mahan argued that the study of history demonstrated that Hannibal's undoing—failure to deploy naval power equal to that of the enemy—was not an isolated event but a fault that had plagued many campaigns. In the preface of *Influence of Sea Power upon History* he compares the failure of Hannibal (and the concomitant success in that war of the Roman general Scipio) with the failure in the nineteenth century of Napoleon and the success of the Duke of Wellington. Although these cases were over two thousand years apart, they manifested a universal principle: in both, "mastery of the sea rested with the victor."<sup>21</sup>

Mahan's sea-power thesis and his political philosophy were based on a historiographical approach called "subordination." The composition of history, Mahan asserted in his 1902 presidential address to the American Historical Association, begins with a "multiplicity of details often contradictory" that "do not readily lend themselves to a unity of treatment."<sup>22</sup> Like that of an artist, the task of the historian is to find unity within the multiplicity of human affairs. Banal curiosities need to be discarded and the important facts of history "subordinated" to "a central idea."<sup>23</sup> The central ideas of history, like the tension between freedom and slavery, are motivated primarily by conflict. In Mahan's histories, the tension among nations in international affairs and the appropriate means through which to handle conflict and war in particular situations receive the most attention.

Many of Mahan's ideas about war, particularly about strategy and tactics, are influenced strongly by Jomini's *Art of War*. Jomini was not a political philosopher. Though Jomini recognized the importance of politics, especially the roles of diplomacy and statesmanship in war, many moral ambiguities arise from his work. Jomini, like Mahan, was not an adherent of the traditional just-war theory. He recognized that nations go to war for a variety of reasons, some of them more defensible than others. He openly admits, in the first chapter of his work, that many wars arise from "so many doubtful and contested rights."<sup>24</sup> Whereas just-war theory holds that war can be waged only for a just reason, Jomini does not make the pursuit of justice a necessary prerequisite of warfare. Wars that according to just-war theory must not be waged can still be fought according to Jomini's work, with its moral ambiguities. In the interplay of national interest and moral responsibility, it is clear that national interest dominates Jomini's thoughts; Mahan, nevertheless, owing to the limitations of Jomini's work, often focuses on the role of conflict in human affairs.

The prevalence of conflict in both human and international affairs guided Mahan's emphasis on the impulses, sentiments, and feelings of nations and their citizens.<sup>25</sup> Although these elements of human behavior are volatile, Mahan posited a fairly static view of human nature: "It must be remembered that, among all changes, the nature of man remains the same."<sup>26</sup> He provided neither a stage of human history in which the flaws of human nature are overcome nor the possibility that human nature itself can change. Since he believed that human nature was constant, Mahan was able to make a universal claim about humanity: "All men seek gain and, more or less, love money; but the way in which gain is sought will have a marked effect upon the commercial fortunes and the history of the people inhabiting a country."<sup>27</sup> Humankind is, was, and always will be moved by a universal principle: the pursuit of interest. The nation does not differ from the individual in its pursuit of interest. Rather, the pursuit of interests is amplified in the nation, especially in the realm of international relations.

Successful nations, Mahan posited, adhere to what he called the "national will," or "popular will." The national will is different from that of the government. It is best defined as the opinion of the majority of the citizenry.<sup>28</sup> Nations are simply agents of the people. "Governments," Mahan claimed, "are trustees, not principals; and as such must put first the lawful interests of their wards, their own people."<sup>29</sup> The policies of a strong government will need to be congruent with the national interest, because the most successful policies of a nation are grounded in "the sentiment of the people."<sup>30</sup> Thus, statesmen who wish to push certain policies that are currently against the wishes of the people must somehow convince the people to convert to their positions.<sup>31</sup> While Mahan himself was an intellectual and not a statesman, he took his own advice. In order that America might expand

its commercial interests and become a sea power, Mahan attempted to convert the American people through his own writings to support his main political project—the expansion of America’s sea power.

The opening line of *Influence of Sea Power upon History* boldly states, “The history of Sea Power is largely, though by no means solely, a narrative of contests between nations, of mutual rivalries, of violence frequently culminating in war.”<sup>32</sup> Embedded in this thesis is Mahan’s view that conflict is a natural part of human nature. Human nature, moved by various feelings and impulses, is volatile and avaricious. History, he argues, has shown that the course of human affairs is a narrative of competition. Whether at peace or at war, nations act out of both impulse and calculation of profit. Tension arises naturally among neighboring nations, because they often have the same pursuits. “Clashing interests” lead to “angry feelings” over various economic concerns, and then to attempts by nations “to exclude others, either by legislative methods of monopoly or prohibitory regulations, or, when these failed, by direct violence.”<sup>33</sup> Successful nations have to find ways to procure their interests while simultaneously protecting themselves against their competitors. War is just one possible solution to such predicaments, but Mahan defended adamantly a nation’s right to wage it: nations have a “right to insure by just means whatsoever contributes to natural progress, and correlatively to combat injurious action taken by an outside agency, if the latter overpass its own lawful sphere.”<sup>34</sup> The basis for international relations is national interest. The impulses, sentiments, and feelings of a nation dictate its relationship with other nations. Peace, nevertheless, can be found, if there exists mutual profit in attaining it. Nations invade other nations (or indigenous groups) only if there is something to gain from the conquest or occupation. Sometimes interests encourage nations to invade; in other cases, interests encourage nations to negotiate treaties.<sup>35</sup>

The pursuit of interest stems from self-preservation, which Mahan defined quite broadly. “The first law of states, as of man,” Mahan wrote, “is self-preservation—a term which cannot be narrowed to the bare tenure of a stationary round of existence.”<sup>36</sup> Self-preservation is not simply a reaction against an external threat but something more comprehensive: it is the right to defend the nation’s interests, whether in direct response to provocation or not.<sup>37</sup> Self-preservation is not merely instinctual but also strategic and calculative. The use of reason, not just instinct and the passions, is necessary to preserve the nation. A nation ought to realize that it may not possess tomorrow what it does at the current moment. Preparedness for defense is legitimate, because it is prudent for a nation to take precautions against future disasters. When not at war, the most appropriate act of self-preservation is economic expansion. A healthy nation needs to engage economically with other nations and to compete with its neighbors. Mahan’s study

of history even suggests that competition often has positive, constructive, and moral qualities. The prosperity of the Western world derives “from the fact that our present world of civilization consists of strong opposing nationalities, and is not one huge, consolidated imperium . . . [where] the individual declension [i.e., decline] of the Roman citizen had destroyed the material from which the more healthful organism of earlier days could have been reconstituted.”<sup>38</sup> The defeat of Carthage, for example, provided Rome with no antagonism; instead of flourishing, Roman mores faltered.<sup>39</sup> Mahan defended competition by imagining what the world would look like if there were no competition. Behind his argument is the belief that creativity and innovation need some sort of impetus; complacency breeds stagnation. Likewise, from a moral perspective, the absence of perceived evil or actual struggle fosters decadence. It is vigorous, antagonistic competition—the need to overcome something or someone—that molds great men and nations. Without Napoleon, there would have been no Nelson. Competition provides the necessity that forges the tools and means by which progress is made.

The closest synonym to “progress,” in Mahan’s understanding, is “growth.” Nevertheless, Mahanian progress is a vague concept, best defined as the “onward movement of the world [that] has to be accepted as a fact, to be advantageously dealt with by guidance, not by mere opposition, still less by unprofitable bewailing of things undesirably past.”<sup>40</sup> Progress is a fact not because nature itself inherently progresses but because a particular nation is bound to take advantage of another’s weaknesses. Progress, in other words, occurs through human activity and effort. Unlike Herbert Spencer, in whose thinking progress happens naturally, through evolution, from homogeneity to heterogeneity, Mahan argues that progress is achieved laboriously, from human toil and experience.<sup>41</sup> It is possible, for instance, for progress to slow down and even, theoretically, to falter entirely. Progress is “dependent upon each man’s thorough, consummate knowledge of his own business, supplemented by an adequate understanding of the occupations and need of his neighbors.”<sup>42</sup> Progress is the result of human reason, not the movements of the natural order. Mahan admits that the “raw materials” of progress often come from geographical and physical conditions, but, just as a nation must touch a sea if it is to develop a navy, the success of a nation often depends on its geographical, cultural, and racial characteristics.<sup>43</sup> In the modern age, Mahan argued of his time, progress advances by looking outward and is achieved through interaction with the outside world. The aforementioned three determinants of sea power—production, shipping, and colonies—involve constant motion and growth. This growth intensifies when other, opposing nations are also expanding, thereby creating competition.

Mahan’s focus on development and competition affected the way in which he understood the nature of human rights. Mahan defined natural rights as those



“that result from the simple fact of being born.”<sup>44</sup> Natural rights differed, for him, from political or legal rights in that the latter “depend upon other fitnesses than that of merely being a man.”<sup>45</sup> Using this distinction, Mahan defended the imperialism, colonialism, and expansion of Europe over the less developed parts of the world on the ground that the indigenous peoples of those regions did not have natural rights to the lands they occupied, whatever legal or political rights they might have enjoyed. No nation, he argued, has a natural right to its land. Territory is held by *fitness*. Mankind at large has a natural right to the unused goods of idle lands; hence, Mahan asserted, the raw materials of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East belonged to those who could develop them. The strongest, most progressive nation is the most likely to use and to develop a region’s natural goods most efficiently; the strong, then, should rule over those resources.<sup>46</sup>

As the historian Walter LaFeber has noted, Mahan defined “colonialism” differently from the seventeenth-century mercantilists. Sometimes Mahan’s use of the term centered on created settlements, such as in Hawaii, but most of the time he associated it with purely strategic points of trade and military forts.<sup>47</sup> For example, Gibraltar, an English possession, was considered by Mahan to be a colony although it was primarily a strategic naval fort. Colonialism, then, fundamentally involved two things for Mahan. First, it brought wealth for the nation. Second, it provided a base for further expansion and acted as a check against hostile movements of foreign nations. Mahan used the example of India, the possession of which had given England both wealth and a strong military position in the Indian Ocean. Protecting India required England to have a strong navy and, to create a highway to India, colonial and strategic possessions in the Mediterranean. It was for this reason that England possessed both Gibraltar and the Suez Canal.<sup>48</sup> The constant development of the navy, ever larger in response to England’s own needs (and to the challenges posed by its neighbors and competitors) was necessary for the successful administration of colonial India.

Mahan constantly stressed the importance of naval armament because a navy represented not only power to protect but power to rule. Navies, Mahan remarked, “can be felt where national armies cannot go.”<sup>49</sup> More sophisticated than ever before, navies provided defense, communication, transportation, and the protection of trade. Most important of all, navies gave their nations a chance to secure peace. For this reason, Mahan applauded the military buildup of the Western powers, convinced that it was diminishing the likelihood of inter-European combat. With their gaze on colonialism and imperialism, the Western nations were able to participate in healthy competition without destroying each other. Armament—not the pacifism of men like Norman Angell—created true humanitarianism.<sup>50</sup> Mahan wrote, “The most beneficial use of a military force is not to wage war, however successfully, but to prevent war, with all its suffering,

expense, and complications of embarrassments.”<sup>51</sup> Mahan’s balance of powers, however, did not adequately deter violence in non-Western states.

### MORAL RESPONSIBILITY, CONSCIENCE, AND THE LIMITS OF LAW

Throughout his writings, Mahan argued consistently that there is a strong correlation between national policy and public opinion. As a nation follows a certain interest because its citizens demand it, so will a nation carry out a certain policy if the people think it has a responsibility to do so. Moral responsibility stems from a conviction that a certain position is morally right. It moves the nation to transcend politics based solely on calculation and instinct, to rise to questions of right and wrong. Mahan stated that “to regard the world as governed by self-interest only is to live in a non-existent world,” adding that the causes of war were now based on convictions of good and evil, though interests certainly remained.<sup>52</sup> At first glance, this statement seems to contradict the centrality of national interest in international affairs as outlined in *Influence of Sea Power upon History*. Mahan resolved this ambiguity by explaining that an issue of national interest, especially one concerning tension with other nations, “gradually assumes the aspect of a right and a wrong.”<sup>53</sup> There are two important points to be made here. First, questions of right and wrong are based on the feelings of the citizenry and are decided by a majoritarian consensus; right and wrong, therefore, are not necessarily absolutes. Second, questions of right and wrong are sometimes not independent of national interest. Hence, part of the tension between national interest and moral responsibility is resolved by the fact that both derive from the sentiments of the people.

Mahan’s moral subjectivity and the importance he gives to public opinion are products of his Protestantism. Mahan believed in the supremacy of the individual conscience in questions of what is right and wrong. He argued further that the individual has not only the right to *hold* a belief but also a moral duty to *act* on that belief. Mahan begins his spiritual autobiography, *The Harvest Within*, by emphasizing the relationship between the roles of exteriority and spiritual interiority. In particular, he emphasizes the role of intentionality: “the moral and spiritual value of acts depends upon the motive.”<sup>54</sup> This point is central to Mahan’s political writings. If individuals or nations are to make a moral decision, they must do so freely and without coercion. Morality cannot be forced by an alien, exterior force; rather, an act is moral only when it is deliberated and acted on freely and without compulsion.

Although Mahan did not articulate the distinction, he used the term “moral responsibility” in two different ways: the moral responsibility a nation has to itself, on one hand, and on the other, the moral responsibility a nation has to the

human race. First and foremost is the duty the nation has to itself, to maintain its own conscience. On these moral matters, which are especially prominent in international affairs, the nation needs to stand by its own understandings, its own reasoning capacities, not allowing other nations to interfere with its policies and beliefs. The nation's exercise of reason forms the basis of Mahan's condemnation of international arbitration and, more generally, his reservations about international law. Second, the nation has a moral responsibility to contribute to the progress of humankind. Western nations, like America, ought to act out of beneficence toward weaker nations, peoples, and indigenous groups that "require" exposure to Western culture and Christianity. The single greatest example of this perceived feeling of responsibility was the divine and covenantal charge that many Americans, including Mahan, believed they had assumed in acquiring the Philippines.

To actualize moral responsibility, force often is needed. Force in and of itself is neither innately evil nor incompatible with Christianity. "Force," Mahan argued, "must be used for the benefit of the community, of the commonwealth of the world."<sup>55</sup> Since there is no ultimate earthly arbiter or judge to determine the rightness of an action, it is the right of the nation itself to decide what it ought to do. Like individuals, nations have consciences, and although the conscience of any given nation can—and may—be misguided, the nation still has a right and duty to follow it. Mahan wrote, almost as a theologian might, that "even if mistaken, the moral wrong of acting against conviction works a deeper injury . . . than can the merely material disasters that may follow upon obedience."<sup>56</sup> Consequently, it is better to commit a wrong act with a good intention than to do a good act for a wrong reason. This supremacy of conscience for Mahan undoubtedly derives from his Protestantism, but whereas Christianity assigns conscience to the individual, Mahan allocates it to the nation. Conscience, according to Mahan, is a gift from God and cannot be violated. If a nation defiles its conscience, it abandons its supreme reasoning tool.<sup>57</sup> This reasoning, however, has a tremendous social and political implication: such emphasis on conscience leads to subjectivity. The parallel and connection between Mahan's conception of conscience and his conception of national interest are unmistakable. They both rest on the presupposition that a competing nation has no right to enforce its morality over another nation except by means of force. Since different national consciences inevitably disagree on important issues, disputes among nations are natural in and integral to international affairs—hence, the need to arm, in case of war.

Since Mahan held that national conscience needs to be in accordance with the judgment of an individual nation, his political thought was naturally suspicious of international law and was opposed adamantly to arbitration. International law, according to Mahan, did not guarantee moral decisions: "Law, itself, which its

extreme advocates desire to see installed in place of war, is, in last analysis, simply force regulated—a most desirable end—but inadequate for the very reason that it is only a manifestation of a power which is manifold in its exhibition.”<sup>58</sup> If law is only regulated force, it has no inherent moral value. Law, in general, is simply conventional because the majority of its premises are utilitarian and arbitrary. Though law may advance justice occasionally, it is not certain to pronounce the correct verdict. Since international law cannot be changed easily, it is an unreliable arbiter in particular scenarios. Furthermore, Mahan claimed, “the positiveness inherent in the very idea of law, its lack of elasticity, renders it too frequently inadequate to the settlement of certain classes of disputes, because in them an accepted law exists, decision in accordance with which would simply perpetuate injustice or sustain intolerable conditions.”<sup>59</sup> Positive international law, in other words, is an inelastic universal principle unsuited for specific events. Consequently, adherence to international law creates dysfunctional scenarios in which a nation is hindered from doing what it thinks is moral.

Mahan was especially critical of arbitration, which many of his contemporary American and European intellectuals desired to be required by international law. His case against arbitration was twofold. First, Mahan argued from the perspective of conscience. Conscience, not positive law, is the supreme medium through which God communicates. Arbitration, then, is an act “of submitting to an impartial third party a question, not of interests, nor of facts, but of right and wrong, and therefore of conscience.”<sup>60</sup> Bluntly put, arbitration is the forfeiture of conscience: “Fidelity to conscience,” Mahan wrote, “implies not only obedience to its dictates, but earnest heart-searching, the use of every means, to ascertain its true command.”<sup>61</sup> Conscience, therefore, sometimes prohibits following a law. Mahan, drawing on then-senator William Seward’s famous denouncement in 1850 of the Fugitive Slave Act, stated that there is a higher law than the Constitution, one that must be interpreted individually. By extension, the Fugitive Slave Act represented, for both Seward at the time and Mahan later, a grave offense to the higher law and consequently was not to be followed.<sup>62</sup> If a citizen has a conscientious right to defy a positive domestic law, then surely a nation has the right to defy a positive international law. Mahan used this line of reasoning to attack arbitration. If an international arbiter or legislative body decreed an unfair verdict or issued an unjust decree, a nation ought to have a right to disobey that law simply on the grounds that acceptance would violate its conscience. This decision to reject the arbiter’s judgment was unlikely to go unpunished by the international community, leading quite easily to war—unnecessarily, in Mahan’s view.

Second, Mahan criticized arbitration from the perspective of sovereignty. Even if a nation benefits from arbitration in the short term, it risks threats to its national sovereignty. Mahan wrote that “law, strictly so called, presupposes a lawmaker;

and for international law the lawmaker has not yet come into existence.”<sup>63</sup> Mahan feared that some sort of international body would have to be developed to give arbitration teeth, causing American citizens to be subject in certain cases to foreign rule. Justice would not be guaranteed from this foreign rule; in fact, Mahan doubted altogether the feasibility of justice in such a case, because all nations have their own interests. In the modern world—interconnected even in Mahan’s time—all nations have interests that could prejudice specific decisions. Arbitration, consequently, was hopelessly idealistic and naive; it does not erase the eternal realities, constants arising from nature itself: competition, national interest and self-interest, force, and greed. Proponents of arbitration, he argued, did not recognize its potential for tyranny. To express the futility of arbitration, Mahan compared it to the perceived tyranny of the medieval papacy over kingdoms—a sharp jab from a devout high Anglican.<sup>64</sup> As in the Middle Ages, he claimed, arbitration would be decided by an arbitrary power motivated by its own biases and interests and overriding the consciences of nations.

After dismissing arbitration as an unreasonable assault against national sovereignty and the denial of national conscience, Mahan proceeded to argue that it would hinder America’s ability to make sound moral decisions. He used the example of the Spanish-American War. Had a third party arbitrated between Spain and the United States, he was sure, American intervention in Cuba would have been condemned, because an arbitrator would likely have applied existing positive law.<sup>65</sup> Positive law, however, would have been unable to address the many wrongs and injustices committed in Cuba by Spain, which according to Mahan was an oppressive, feudal, and cruel power. Mahan held sincerely that there was nothing unjust about America’s decision to intervene in Cuba—freeing Cuba from Spanish tyranny was a legitimate end. To deny America such an opportunity to follow its conscience and to liberate Cuba was to deny America’s conscience and sovereignty. Moreover, it was more than likely that international reprisals against American involvement in the Spanish-American War would have stemmed from selfishness and various European interests, not from moral concern for the oppressed.

## THE APPLICATION OF MAHAN’S IDEAS TO THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Mahan’s grappling with the problems of international affairs and geopolitics pushed him to reject the policy of American isolationism in a world of rapidly advancing imperialism. Mahan was an imperialist, but he was an *American* imperialist. He was well aware of the limits of his nation’s armed forces and of how little interest his commercial-minded countrymen had in warfare. Mahan’s policy

positions reflected the tension between following public opinion and promoting causes contrary to public opinion. Consistent with his philosophy, Mahan did not call for any imperial project comparable to those of Britain or France, not only because such a project would be beyond America's capabilities but also because it would not be in accordance with public opinion.

Having taken the pulse of the Republic, Mahan supported the principle of reciprocity advanced by Secretary of State (1881 and 1889–92) James G. Blaine. Mahan defined reciprocity as the abandonment of “exclusive interest, which is the citadel of protection, to embrace that of mutual benefit, the cornerstone upon which the advocates of freedom of trade rest their argument.”<sup>66</sup> At first glance, the principle seems to be in sharp contrast with Mahan's emphasis on competitive national interest. Yet reciprocity is pursued not for its own sake but out of national interest. It opens up markets, especially non-Western markets, and allows competition among nations to flourish without risk of bloodshed. Moreover, reciprocity permits a Western nation, such as the United States, to spread its core values with other, less developed nations. Of America's increased engagement with foreign nations Mahan wrote that “what the nation has gained in expression is a regenerating idea, an uplifting of the heart, a seed of future beneficent activity, a going out of self into the world to communicate the gift it has so bountifully received.”<sup>67</sup> It was this understanding of reciprocity that later formed the basis of his support for the Open Door policy, by which America benefited from trade with China (national interest) while also fulfilling its duty to humankind by promoting Western civilization and propagating Christianity (moral responsibility). Reciprocity, in this light, is charity with interest. It does not imply equality between the interacting nations or peoples, but it does provide—when the United States is involved—material and spiritual benefit by virtue of economic access to American goods and cultural access to Christianity.

As his adherence to the principle of reciprocity demonstrates, Mahan was concerned with economic, cultural, and political influence but not necessarily dominion. Mahan took different stances on how to promote American influence. Owing to his emphasis on particularity, Mahan's policy positions are not formulaic and rigid; his reasons for particular stances on given issues varied according to the nuances of specific policy positions. On issues like the canal across the Central American isthmus, influence in the Caribbean, the annexation of Hawaii, and control over the Persian Gulf, Mahan's concerns were based primarily on national interest. However, on two very important matters—the Monroe Doctrine and the Spanish-American War—his policies were based on both national interest and moral responsibility. These two examples highlight how Mahan's stances integrated the two concepts.

### *The Monroe Doctrine*

Mahan stressed, from the publication of *Influence of Sea Power upon History* until his death, the crucial importance of the Monroe Doctrine. He stated bluntly that the Monroe Doctrine was a “product of interest.”<sup>68</sup> Mahan valued particularly the practicality of the Monroe Doctrine, arguing that it was the product of prudent reflection on American security. Before its promulgation by President James Monroe, the early Republic had suffered various assaults on both land and sea by the European colonial powers. Mahan wrote, “Not reason only, but feeling, based on experience of actual inconvenience, suffering, and loss—loss of life, and loss of wealth, political anxiety, and commercial disturbance—conspired to intensify opposition to any avoidable renewal of similar conditions.”<sup>69</sup> Although its bedrock claim—that no European power was free to recolonize lost colonies or gain new ones—had remained consistent in the nineteenth century, Mahan argued, the doctrine had to be expanded and developed to address America’s contemporary interests; it had been founded in part on the basis of interest, and the interests of nations change.<sup>70</sup> Mahan asserted forcefully, especially in his writings on the construction of the isthmian canal, the importance of continuing to assert the Monroe Doctrine in support of contemporary concerns. He warned repeatedly that with the completion of the canal, Europe would be tempted to attain new territories in the Americas that could threaten American superiority in the Caribbean as well as control over the canal. It was, therefore, in the American interest to have a navy strong enough to deter European colonization in the region.<sup>71</sup>

If national interest formed the (elastic) foundation of the Monroe Doctrine, it was force that upheld its implementation. The Monroe Doctrine, in other words, was only as strong as the American navy made it.<sup>72</sup> In Mahan’s thought, however, force was not applied simply in the pursuit of interest but also in the promotion of moral responsibility. First, Mahan argued that the Monroe Doctrine was a declaration of America’s moral conscience. America, therefore, reserved the right to intervene in Latin and South America if its conscience compelled it to intervene. Mahan received worldwide attention on this issue while serving as an American delegate at the first Hague conference. There, consistent with his political philosophy, Mahan made a provocative stand against article 27 of the conference’s declaration, which stated, “The Signatory Powers consider it their duty, in case a serious dispute threatens to break out between two or more of them, to remind these powers that the permanent Court of Arbitration is open to them.”<sup>73</sup> Mahan perceived in this proposed language a clear violation of national conscience, in that it called for third-party intervention in American affairs within South America, perhaps even paving the way for destruction of the Monroe Doctrine itself. Mahan, with the support of the majority of the American delegation, requested



and received an addendum explicitly stating that article 27 was not applicable to the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>74</sup> Not a single nation at the conference dared to object to the request.<sup>75</sup>

Second, the Monroe Doctrine was based on moral responsibility in that it assisted the nations of South America in maintaining their own self-determination. America, Mahan wrote, has “a common sympathy with peoples struggling for relief from a very real oppression.”<sup>76</sup> In opposition to those European nations who desired to take back parts of South America, the U.S. position was “sustained by policy and by a conviction of rightfulness.”<sup>77</sup> Legitimate concern for Central and South America, Mahan insisted, did enter into America’s calculation in upholding the Monroe Doctrine. Mahan’s view protected the self-determinism of the various countries of South and Central America; with the notable exception of the lands annexed as a result of the Spanish-American War, it did not call for American colonialism there. He did not claim that America had “quasi suzerainty” over South America, as England did over its colonies.<sup>78</sup> By treating South American nations as sovereign nations, Mahan claimed, the United States occupied higher moral ground than its European competitors, who would have disregarded South and Central American self-determinism altogether.

### *The Spanish-American War and the Acquisition of the Philippines*

Mahan’s position on the Spanish-American War highlighted how a nation can be motivated simultaneously by both national interest and moral responsibility. Mahan claimed that Cuba’s “deliverance from oppression [had been] the object of the war.”<sup>79</sup> America had had a moral goal in the war. While it may have had certain interests in the possession of Cuba—an island only ninety miles away from American coastline—its actions had been based also on nobler sentiments. In short, the United States had seen a nation suffering under an unjust authority and, finding this tyranny repulsive, had followed its conscience and uplifted its neighbor from the “generally iniquitous character” of Spain.<sup>80</sup>

The war having culminated in the liberation of Cuba and the Philippines, Mahan believed that America was embarking on a new chapter in its history, one of colonialism. Mahan reflected on the moral responsibility America had to its new dependencies. Colonialism, Mahan wrote, is “novel to us; we may make blunders; but, guided by [the example of British] experience, we should reach the goal more quickly.”<sup>81</sup> Mahan did not shy away from the fact that the United States had been formed as a result, in effect, of British colonialism. Moreover, he did not believe that America’s experience with British colonialism provided a sufficient reason to oppose colonialism. Rather, it had the potential to be a great colonial power itself precisely because it had been ruled by a colonial power, making it more sensitive to possible abuses. Mahan warned that if America “sees in its new responsibilities,

first of all, markets and profits, with incidental resultant benefit to the natives, it will go wrong. Through such mistakes Great Britain . . . lost the United States.”<sup>82</sup> Genuine care and consideration needed to be shown to the people of its new dependencies. Mahan stressed that it would be bad policy to create unnecessary tension with its colonies, especially the Philippines.

This newfound moral responsibility with respect to the Philippines certainly was not without consideration of interest, for it was in the nation’s interest to have a stable and productive colony. Mahan went so far as to declare that the two concepts do not need to be separate: the “interest of the nation is one with its beneficence.”<sup>83</sup> From the standpoint of interest, there are two clear reasons why he supported the acquisition of the Philippines. The first was that it was compatible with the foundational propositions of his naval philosophy. Colonialism was a natural corollary of production and naval power. Possession of the Philippines, Mahan hoped, would stimulate the American navy to develop and expand. The second reason was geopolitical. Mahan believed that “enlightened self-interest demands us to recognize not merely, and in general, the imminence of the great question of the farther East, which is rising so rapidly before us, but also specifically, the importance to us of a strong and beneficent occupation of adjacent territory.”<sup>84</sup> Mahan both feared and respected the Far East, especially Japan. Hence, America’s occupation of the Philippines would have a twofold effect. It would force the East to recognize America as a formidable power; an Eastern power expanding its territory would have to do so in light of America’s presence in the Philippines. Moreover, the Philippines gave America better access to the Far Eastern markets.

## REFLECTIONS ON MAHAN’S POLITICAL THOUGHT

With the advent of the United Nations and increased internationalism, Mahan’s political thought seems to have been rejected by contemporary U.S. policy making. Yet in fact Mahan’s influence may be today more pertinent than it may appear at a glance. By 1893, when Frederick Jackson Turner declared the end of the American frontier, Mahan had already (in 1890) identified the new American frontier: the sea.<sup>85</sup> The history of the twentieth century, with its world wars, and of the early twenty-first, with its globalization, shows that Mahan was correct. The sea is a perpetual frontier—there are always new markets and new modes of expansion. For the most part, Mahan favored peace and negotiation (though as the Philippines experience showed he was open to coercion and force). This point, however, needs to be tempered with the realization that had Mahan been a British or German subject he most certainly would have given quite different advice to his countrymen. Ultimately, the decision between acting from national interest and acting from moral responsibility rested on the nuances of the particular moment.

Mahan's political thought was based on a combination of national interest and moral responsibility. Although the former is concerned with calculation and appetites, whereas the latter derives from principles of morality, Mahan was able to reconcile the two concepts by arguing that both derive ultimately from the national will. Their actualization rests equally on the ability of the nation to make its own decisions. Mahan held consistently that since there can be no earthly arbiter, decisions about whether an action is just, moral, necessary, or useful must be left solely to the individual nations making them.

However, a significant international problem emerges: if individual nations are viewed as the only just arbiters, decisions from national interest might be called—quite inappropriately—judgments of conscience. That is, there arises the danger of national interest subsuming conscience. Under the banner of conscience or moral responsibility, nations might declare war or commit acts of aggression when, in truth, it is only their interests that are being served. Mahan does not resolve this tension; his thought is based on the conviction that moral truths of right and wrong can be determined only on the basis of the feelings of individual nations. Mahan falls short of moral relativism, though, because he acknowledges openly that nations may err. But nations have the *right* to err; other competing nations hoping to interfere cannot speak infallibly or unbiasedly, are motivated by their own selfish interests, and would object if other nations interfered in *their* own business. By stressing the importance of determination by the individual nation whether its own actions are moral, Mahan was attempting to avoid the international tyranny of nations disguising their own interests as matters of conscience and responsibility. Mahan's concern for the potential dangers of arbitration is genuine and shows, contra the judgments of Hofstadter and Beard, that Mahan was neither a trigger-happy imperialist nor a rambunctious school-boy but a sober-minded observer of world affairs.

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#### NOTES

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2. This theme is fleshed out in Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998).
3. Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1909).
4. Richard W. Tuck, *The Ambiguous Relationship: Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Thayer Mahan* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1987), pp. 1–6, 101–108.
5. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, 5th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1894).
6. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
7. Robert Seager II, *Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Man and His Letters* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1977), p. 215.

8. W. D. Puleston, *Mahan: The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1939), p. 159.
9. William E. Livezey, *Mahan on Sea Power* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma, 1947), p. 13; Charles Carlisle Taylor, *The Life of Admiral Mahan* (London: John Murray, 1920), pp. 66, 70, 73.
10. Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2006), pp. 3–44.
11. Puleston, *Mahan*, p. 207.
12. Norman Angell, "The Great Illusion: A Response to Captain A. T. Mahan," *North American Review* 195 (1912), p. 772.
13. Charles Beard, "Giddy Minds and Foreign Quarrels," *Harper's Magazine* 179 (September 1939), pp. 338–39, quoted in George R. Leighton, "Beard and Foreign Policy," in *Charles A. Beard: An Appraisal*, ed. Howard K. Beale (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp. 166–67 [emphasis added].
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16. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Some Neglected Aspects of War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1907), pp. 25, 28, 30.
17. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan*, ed. Robert Seager II and Doris D. Maguire (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1975). The index is in the third volume.
18. Montesquieu's quote is in Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Sea Power in Its Relations to the War of 1812* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1905), vol. 1, p. 27.
19. Philip A. Crowl, "Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian," in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986), p. 450.
20. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *From Sail to Steam* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907), p. 277.
21. Mahan, *Influence*, p. iv.
22. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Naval Administration and Warfare: Some General Principles with Other Essays* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1918), p. 250.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
24. Baron de Jomini, *Art of War*, trans. G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1862), p. 16.
25. These three words are used in several of Mahan's books and often interchangeably.
26. Mahan, *Influence*, p. 89.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
28. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Retrospect and Prospect: Studies in International Relations, Naval and Political* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1902), p. 84; Mahan, *Neglected Aspects*, p. 88. Mahan discusses the will of the German people in *The Interest of America in International Conditions* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1910), p. 172.
29. Mahan, *Interest of America in International Conditions*, p. 42.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
31. Mahan, *Naval Administration*, p. 137.
32. Mahan, *Influence*, p. 1.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and Its Effects upon International Policies* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1900), p. 30.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
41. See Herbert Spencer, "Progress: Its Law and Cause," in *Seven Essays Selected from the*

- Works of Herbert Spencer* (London: Watts, 1907), pp. 7–34.
42. Mahan, *Naval Administration*, p. vii.
43. Mahan, *Problem of Asia*, p. v. Mahan, like certain of his contemporaries, believed that “races” (the Latins, Germans, Chinese, etc.) had different characteristics.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 91.
48. Mahan, *Influence*, pp. 82–83; Mahan, *Problem of Asia*, pp. 27–28; Mahan, *Retrospect*, p. 183.
49. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Armaments and Arbitration: The Place of Force in the International Relations of States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912), p. 66.
50. See Angell, “Great Illusion,” pp. 754–72.
51. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Lessons of the War with Spain and Other Articles* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1918), pp. 286–87.
52. Mahan, *Armaments*, pp. 153, 126.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
54. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Harvest Within: Thoughts on the Life of the Christian* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1909), p. 13.
55. Mahan, *Armaments*, p. 117.
56. Mahan, *Neglected Aspects*, p. 31.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–32, 36–37, 39.
58. Mahan, *Armaments*, p. 106.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
60. Mahan, *Neglected Aspects*, p. 57.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 29.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
64. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1897), p. 224.
65. Mahan, *Armaments*, p. 48.
66. Mahan, *Retrospect*, p. 19.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
68. Mahan, *Naval Administration*, p. 372.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 360.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 407–408.
71. Mahan, *Armaments*, p. 177; Mahan, *Influence*, p. 42.
72. Mahan, *Armaments*, p. 105.
73. Seager, *Alfred Thayer Mahan*, p. 411.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
75. Taylor, *Life of Admiral Mahan*, pp. 98–99.
76. Mahan, *Armaments*, p. 101.
77. *Ibid.*
78. Mahan, *Naval Administration*, p. 396.
79. Mahan, *Lessons*, p. 26.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 245–46.
85. See Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *American Progressivism: A Reader*, ed. Ronald J. Pestritto and William J. Atto (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2008), pp. 67–89.



## BOOK REVIEWS

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### STRATEGY AS A BATTLEGROUND

*The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective*, by Hew Strachan. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013. 322 pages. \$66.70 (paperback \$26.99; Kindle \$17.20).

About halfway through his account of the direction of war, the distinguished Oxford military historian Hew Strachan makes a seemingly minor point about Bernard Brodie, one of the pioneers of limited-war theory during the Cold War. “Brodie had studied Socratic philosophy and had been trained as a historian. These were in some sense the traditional disciplines of strategic thought,” but in the early nuclear age they “were now in retreat” (p. 187). Some might doubt that a Socratic approach combined with historical inquiry is a foundation of strategic thought, or at least of Brodie’s, but in truth Strachan thereby described his own approach to strategic theory and practice as well as anyone possibly could. Strachan, however, is not in retreat. He has taken the initiative and is very much on the offensive—against just about everyone’s sacred cow.

Following Clausewitz directly and perhaps Socrates’s greatest student, Plato, indirectly, Strachan has a dialectical approach to thinking about strategy, which is fundamentally a conversation, the sort any war college could only welcome. It occurs at many levels, and often the

interlocutors speak at cross-purposes. Most fundamentally it is a conversation between theory and practice, one insisting on clarity and therefore abstraction, the other on concrete experience.

As the conversation develops, Strachan brings in new interlocutors. Virtually all the great and many minor strategic theorists and practitioners of the modern era have something to say in this dialogue: Clausewitz, of course, but also Jomini, Mahan, Corbett, Douhet, Billy Mitchell, Brodie, Herman Kahn, Mao Zedong; Generals Powell, Clark, Petraeus, and McChrystal; Admirals Morgan and Mullen; and many, many others. While they converse with each other, all also are engaged in a conversation with practice, i.e., what works and what does not.

That conversation is rooted in a deeper one about the relation of the past (continuity and change) to the present and the foreseeable future (contingency), meaning Strachan harnesses his vast understanding of the past to help us think about the future direction of strategy and war. His dialogue is always about at least these three big questions: What is strategy?



Who should direct it? And where and how should it be made (p. 215)?

Those looking for a clear answer to the first question are likely to be disappointed. Strachan observes that Clausewitz's "*On War* contains many references to the need for principles and system, but never delivers them in a way designed to be learnt by the parrots of military crammers and spoon-fed examinees" (p. 203). Neither does Strachan. Like Socrates, he is an interrogator. He asks what other people, such as the British prime minister and the American president and their military and other subordinates, mean by *policy*, *grand strategy*, *military strategy*, and *operations*. Like Socrates again, he is pretty sure either they do not know or their views are one-sided, if not misguided, and at best limited in utility to a particular moment in time. He frustrates his readers as much as Socrates does in Plato's dialogues because he never quite defines strategy himself. It exists somewhere between war's political purpose and operations that purport to achieve it (p. 220).

As a middle ground between political purpose and military action, strategy also becomes a battleground between those who make policy and those who design and execute operations to achieve it. Strachan's focus is often on the disappearance of strategy in this conflict. Sometimes it is subsumed by policy, which is what he insists happened during the Cold War, when the purpose of strategy was to ensure that major-power, i.e., nuclear, war did not occur, so the use of violence to achieve political objectives among major powers against each other became unthinkable. This also happened after the Cold War, when strategy as a means to achieve political purposes was nearly extinct (with many,

in Europe especially, welcoming its demise), and operations came to occupy the middle ground. This was especially true in the United States, though in such a narrow way that Strachan ascribes fleeting successes in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11 and 2003 to the triumph, i.e., failure, of merely operational thinking. So, in many ways his book becomes a discussion of civil-military relations, with a powerful critique of the pioneer of the field, Samuel Huntington.

Like Socrates, Strachan is willing to question taboos. He argues that, in both England and the United States, the danger of a military leader on a white horse coming to power at the expense of freedom was vastly exaggerated. Liberal principles had taken such deep root in the people that a military coup d'état was simply inconceivable. What private in the U.S. or British military would obey an order from a general to arrest the president or prime minister? So Huntington's principle of strict separation between the roles of statesmen and generals was not merely unnecessary but in many ways counterproductive. "The principal purpose of effective civil-military relations is national security: its output is strategy. Democracies tend to forget that" (p. 76). Following Clausewitz, whom he uses to criticize rather than support Huntington, Strachan insists that war is interactive, the realm of chance, friction, contingency, and unexpected actions from the adversary. And war has its own grammar, often leading to escalation. War, in other words, has its own nature, which politics defies at its own risk. A good Clausewitzian might, indeed must, try to impose the political logic of war on all this, but once the dogs of war are unleashed, they tend to make havoc—that is, they follow their own

direction. As often as not, then, policy and strategy are directed by war; they do not direct it. Responding to that reality requires a dialogue between soldiers and politicians—not the subordination of one element to the other, but rather their “harmonization” (p. 78). For any kind of rationality to be imposed, politics must therefore listen to strategy, which must listen to war, both in its enduring nature and in its changing character. All this suggests a far more prominent role in the conversation for generals and admirals than current norms, often violated in practice, tend to permit.

As a student of the American founders and the American political tradition, this reviewer is not sure Strachan is right to challenge the Anglo-American taboos as much as he does. As a professor of strategy, however, I am certain Strachan has captured something vital for understanding the direction of any war. It arises from Clausewitz’s discussion of war as more than a true chameleon changing its colors from war to war. War does have a nature. It is embodied especially in Clausewitz’s trinity: the relation among reason, passion, and creativity that exists in any war. But that relation changes from war to war. Sometimes one element is more important than another, which gives an entirely different direction to a conflict than the one preceding or succeeding it. Sometimes the elements quarrel among themselves. Each attempts to give direction to war, and the changing historical direction of war is very much the result of the conversation among the parts and the interaction of their whole with others. No wonder, then, that Strachan does not give us the clear and final answers we crave. War will not allow them; neither will he. We therefore will have to figure the answers

out for ourselves. A fine way to start is by reading this subtle and erudite book.

KARL WALLING



*Authority, Ascendancy, and Supremacy: China, Russia, and the United States’ Pursuit of Relevancy and Power*, by Gregory O. Hall. New York: Routledge, 2015. 188 pages. \$145 (paperback \$42.95).

Gregory O. Hall, a professor of political science at Morehouse College, has taken an acknowledged fact of contemporary international relations—the dominance of the United States, Russia, and China within the international system—and developed a compelling academic model supporting this.

Hall argues that the Tripolar Conflict, Cooperation, and Competition (TC3) Framework model reflects the reality of the international system since at least the early 2000s. From Central Asia to the Middle East and Northeast Asia, Hall demonstrates that the United States, China, and Russia are locked in a complex web of interrelationships that increasingly determines the outcome of pressing regional, and even global, issues. As the traditional economic and military advantages of the United States decline relative to those of some rising powers, the international system will be even more defined by the interactions of these three dominant global powers.

Hall cogently traces the gradual transition of the global system following the “unipolar” moment that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. While the United States remains first among equals in numerous metrics of national power, the comparative diminution of its own influence and the rise of other power centers

have led to an international environment in which regional problems must be resolved in conjunction with the other critical global actors—namely, Russia and China. Hall contrasts previous examples of American unilateral action—from military intervention in the Balkans in the late 1990s to the 2003 invasion of Iraq—with more recent examples of U.S. foreign policy being constrained by Russian or Chinese concerns. Whether it is Russian support for the al-Assad regime in Syria, China's sustainment of the Kim dynasty in North Korea, or both Moscow and Beijing's attempts to constrain possible U.S. military action against Iran's nuclear program, Hall marshals the full panoply of regional issues to demonstrate the relevance of his framework.

For the national security community, Hall's work represents an important translation of international relations theory to the realm of practical policy making. His "strategic triangle" between the United States, Russia, and China is an accepted fact of international politics with which leaders around the world have grappled for at least the last decade. On almost any security issue of note, whether traditional or nontraditional, the acquiescence of at least two of the three major powers is essential for any action. Whether it is Russia and China constraining U.S. options in Middle East hot spots such as Syria or Iran, or the United States and China increasing their influence in traditionally Russian-dominated Central Asia, the triangular relationship plays out on nearly every conceivable regional security question. While the popular literature continues to debate a "post-American world" and other slogans, a "strategic triangle" has long been the reality for Russian, Chinese, and U.S. decision makers.

While Hall is particularly adept at translating the academic literature into a compelling narrative that fits the global political reality, he is less sure footed in properly contextualizing the limits of American power. Although it is clear that global power is more diffuse than in the years directly following the Soviet Union's collapse, and American power is certainly more constrained on a variety of regional issues, Washington still maintains an unparalleled ability to act militarily when and where it chooses even in the face of strong objections from Moscow and Beijing. The 2011 intervention in Libya demonstrates that, while Russian and Chinese concerns were certainly considered in ways unheard of during the 1990s and early 2000s, Washington still ultimately exercises a tremendous degree of discretion in the use of force and remains able to apply its overwhelming military advantage in a variety of contingencies despite deep misgivings in Moscow and Beijing.

As Professor Hall rightly notes, the continued economic and military advances of less developed nations such as Turkey, Brazil, Iran, and South Africa will inject new forces and issues into the international agenda. Nontraditional security issues such as water scarcity and environmental degradation, while certainly not replacing the traditional primacy of inter-state competition and conflict, will likely act as a supplement to those dynamics. As the global system seeks to adjust to these actors and issues, the predominance of the United States, China, and Russia in the international system and the reality of cooperation and competition between these powers will continue to define the twenty-first-century international order.

ALEXANDER B. GRAY



*The Battle of Lake Champlain: A "Brilliant and Extraordinary Victory,"* by John H. Schroeder. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 184 pages. \$26.95.

*War in the Chesapeake: The British Campaigns to Control the Bay, 1813–14,* by Charles Neimeyer. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2015. 256 pages. \$44.95.

In 1814, the United States faced a crisis of a magnitude not experienced since the Revolution and not to be exceeded until the Civil War. Congress declared war against the British Empire in 1812 to stop the impressment of sailors on American ships, to maintain the rights of neutral trade, and to stop perceived British support for Native Americans then violently opposing western settlement. Congress and the Madison administration expected a quick victory by ending British control over Canada. After all, Britain was locked in existential struggle with Napoleonic France and could send little assistance to its forces in North America. However, the British in Canada managed to turn back multiple American invasions. Even the stunning naval victory on Lake Erie in 1813 resulted only in local superiority. The key cities of Montreal and Quebec remained firmly in British hands.

With the abdication of Napoleon in 1814, Britain deployed large land and naval forces to North America. Britain's goals were to retaliate for American depredations in Canada, permanently eliminate American military power on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain, establish a neutral Indian territory north of the Ohio River, and seize New Orleans. The American treasury was almost empty, the Atlantic coast was under close blockade, American naval

power on the Atlantic was all but neutralized, and politically the nation was bitterly divided over continuing the war.

Two new books reexamine this period of national crisis. First, John H. Schroeder retells the dramatic story of turning back a powerful British invasion intended to clear Lake Champlain of an American military presence. Lake Champlain makes up a large segment of the traditional invasion corridor linking Montreal to New York City. In September 1814, ten thousand British soldiers, many of them veterans of Wellington's victories in Spain, marched into New York State heading toward the American base at Plattsburgh. A strong Royal Navy squadron accompanied this formidable army. Defending Plattsburgh were a few thousand regulars and militiamen under Brigadier General Alexander Macomb. Master Commandant Thomas Macdonough commanded the naval squadron on the lake. Macomb and Macdonough were determined to defend Plattsburgh, and they prepared an integrated defense. Macomb stationed most of his soldiers in three earthen fortifications across the narrow peninsula formed by the Saranac River and Plattsburgh Bay. Macdonough deployed his four major war vessels anchored in line across the bay. This arrangement exploited American advantages—yet there would be no escape for either force if the British attacks were successful.

Sir George Prevost, governor general of British North America, directed a less-well-coordinated offensive. He urged Captain George Downie to attack Macdonough's squadron. However, Prevost delayed the accompanying land assault to await the results of the fight on the water. Downie intended to lead a column of warships to pierce

the American line, but the wind and currents in the bay refused to cooperate. Instead, the four British warships came into close range of their opposites and anchored to begin a cannonade. Barely fifteen minutes into the fight, an American ball slammed into a British gun, dismounting it—and crushing Downie. The next ranking officer on the flag-ship could not locate the signal book to inform Captain Daniel Pring that Pring was now in command. As a result, each British skipper fought his own battle.

Schroeder recounts the well-known story of Macdonough's use of anchors and cables to rotate his big vessels to bring the maximum number of guns into action. Eventually, superior American gunnery prevailed, and one British vessel after another struck its colors. When Prevost learned that the Americans had shattered his naval force, he called off the land attack and led his frustrated troops back to Montreal.

While Schroeder adds little that is new to the oft-told battle narrative of this improbable victory, his notable contribution is the detailed analysis of how British defeat on this inland body of water affected the peace negotiations. The British ministry offered command in North America to the Duke of Wellington. The Iron Duke carefully spelled out the requirements for military success. In his analysis, Britain could not win a decisive victory until it controlled the water. Only this would yield the operational and tactical mobility to take advantage of the troop surge. Failing to control key lakes and rivers, Wellington opined, the government would be best served by ending the war as rapidly as possible. The ministry received the news of the failures at Plattsburgh and Baltimore in rapid

succession and sent new instructions to its negotiators in Ghent. Britain dropped its objectionable demands, and a treaty was signed on Christmas Eve.

The defense of Baltimore is the final chapter in Charles Neimeyer's excellent narrative of the campaign in Chesapeake Bay. As early as the spring of 1813, a formidable Royal Navy force under Sir George Cockburn entered the bay with the purpose of shutting down American commerce and persuading Madison to withdraw regulars from the fight in Canada to defend the cities, villages, and plantations along the hundreds of miles of coast and along rivers that empty into the bay. The Royal Navy raided with impunity. Captains ordered crews to torch villages, seize food and tobacco, and evacuate thousands of escaped slaves, sending them to freedom in British colonies. Yet Madison refused to redeploy his regulars from the northern campaigns, even after the burning of Washington.

Neimeyer relates this tale lucidly, weaving events and policy change with insightful analysis. The Americans responded to British raids with Commodore Joshua Barney's famed flotilla of gunboats. While Barney was ultimately forced to destroy his squadron to avoid capture, he and his flotillamen and accompanying Marines were the only bright spot in what was otherwise a debacle at Bladensburg, Maryland.

Neither author tells a new story, yet both Schroeder and Neimeyer provide a fresh look fortified with penetrating analysis. Their works are well-balanced, speaking perceptively to national policy, strategy, diplomacy, and joint operations from both sides. These are scholarly works written for a popular readership and are at the top of their genre.

RICHARD V. BARBUTO



*The Ashgate Research Companion to Military Ethics*, ed. James Turner Johnson and Eric D. Patterson. Farnham, Surrey, U.K., and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2015. 464 pages. \$149.95.

The editors and twenty-nine other contributors have produced an impressive collection of essays on military ethics, *not* “ethics and the military.” Thus, one will find nothing about false reporting, fraternization, abusive command climates, limitations on gifts, gays in the military, women in combat, contractor oversight, civil-military relations, hazing, rape, drug or alcohol abuse, suicide by service members, marital violence, postretirement employment restrictions, interservice rivalries, or headquarters politics (careerism).

The first of four parts addresses why a nation morally may use force. Pacifism of any variety is not considered; the Christian-based ideas of just war serve as the fundamental approach. Chapter 1 explains *jus ad bellum* (the state’s right to go to war) as seen by the approach’s classic founders from antiquity through Aquinas (Gregory M. Reichberg). Chapter 2 looks at very recent bases for the use of force (*jus ad vim*), including the “responsibility to protect” weakening the Westphalian idea of sovereign inviolability (Daniel R. Brunstetter). Chapters 3 and 4 examine current international law (Davis Brown) and the military’s role in decisions to use force (Martin L. Cook). The part’s final four chapters focus on “special problems” in resorting to force: preemption (Mary Manjikian), asymmetric warfare and terrorism (Keith Pavlischek), intervention in “failed states” and genocides (Luke Glanville), and weapons of mass destruction (Darrell Cole).

Half the book’s pages are devoted to part 2’s “Right Conduct in the Use of Military Force” (*jus in bello*). Chapters 9–12 discuss the ground of limitations on violence: from the just war tradition (J. Daryl Charles), from a Kantian perspective (Brian Orend), from several contemporary doctrines of human rights (Robert E. Williams, Jr.), and from international humanitarian law (Howard M. Hensel). Chapters 13 (Amos N. Guiora) and 14 (Pauletta Otis) address terrorism; chapters 15–18 explore the problems arising from targeting dual-use facilities (Paul Robinson), employing autonomous unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) (James L. Cook), pursuing “targeted killing” of specific individuals (Laurie R. Blank), and conducting cyber warfare (George R. Lucas, Jr.). Chapters 19–21 explain recent academic debates about the moral equality of combatants (Henrik Syse), how to classify and treat prisoners and detainees (John Sawicki), and what—if anything—remains forbidden even to those with just cause whose enemies are fighting without restraint (David Whetham). Chapter 22 studies military ethics in peacekeeping operations (Bard Maeland); chapter 23 reviews the immense problems associated with justifying and enforcing noncombatant immunity (James Turner Johnson); and chapter 24 discusses the enigmatic topic of “proportionality” in contemporary armed conflict (Paul Gilbert).

Part 3 offers reflections on the recently developed topic of postconflict justice, *jus post bellum*. Chapters 25–28 consider who must take control at war’s end (Eric D. Patterson), how to fight with a future peace in mind (Timothy J. Demy), war crimes trials (Carla L. Reyes), and eventual reconciliation as an ethical military goal (Nigel Biggar).



Part 4 is a valuable addendum giving academic, primarily historical, reviews of military ethics in the Islamic (John Kelsay), Chinese (Ping-cheung Lo), and Indian (Torkel Brekke) traditions.

The editors provide summary introductions to all four parts, and they asked the authors to begin each chapter with an abstract and to close with a conclusion section preceding a list of references. All three features are helpful.

Aptly titled a “research companion,” this is a cutting-edge effort by many leading students of military ethics. I learned major things from every author; and while I especially admire certain chapters, other experts are likely to applaud different contributions most, depending on their own backgrounds. However, all the chapters are aimed at advanced scholars or the highest level of decision makers.

Finally, two critical remarks underscore scholarly responsibilities. The word *guerrilla* is spelled with a single *r* more than a score of times—even quoted materials repeatedly are mangled—in an otherwise laudable chapter by the volume’s expert on unconventional warfare. Second, an author asserts that the Gulf of Tonkin incident was merely a matter of erroneous U.S. Navy reporting. While the Navy now judges that the night “battle” of 4 August 1964 never took place, no one doubts that the 2 August day engagement of USS *Maddox* (DD 731) and three North Vietnamese P-4 torpedo boats happened. (There were eyewitnesses and photographs; a Vietnamese 12.7 mm machine-gun round lodged in *Maddox*’s superstructure; and in 1984 General Vo Nguyen Giap told former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara the attack was deliberate.) The lesson for all of us is that, in

professional ethics, theories are interesting but *facts matter*, usually decisively.

THOMAS GRASSEY



*Waging War, Planning Peace: U.S. Noncombat Operations and Major Wars*, by Aaron Rapport. Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 2015. 266 pages. \$79.95.

Innovative, provocative, and compelling, Aaron Rapport’s *Waging War, Planning Peace* offers a distinct perspective on U.S. failures in postwar stability and reconstruction operations since 1941. The disconnect between waging war and planning peace is the subject of this intriguing study that applies theories of national security policy to four historical case studies. A lecturer at the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge, Rapport examines how the ambitious state-building aims of U.S. presidents and senior advisers were consistently undermined by meager planning.

Rapport invokes “construal level theory” to explain postconflict reconstruction failures following World War II and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, arguing that the Roosevelt and Bush administrations projected confidence and visionary objectives for peace after the war without providing the necessary organizational support. In turn, failures following the Korean and Vietnam Wars are attributed to administrations that did not articulate end-state agendas and instead concentrated on immediate operational and military gains. The flaw common to the actors in all four historical studies is that kinetic aspects of the war were prioritized at the expense of postwar planning.



The construal level theory consists of several key components. The more distant our goals, the greater we construe the long time horizon abstractly. The more immediate our goals, the greater we construe the short-term horizon in detail. Consequently, the *desirability* of distant goals can overshadow their *feasibility*. National leaders who formulate lofty goals for the distant future support *transformative* objectives, while those who focus on the particulars of combat operations tend to be preoccupied with a *maintenance* outlook that is far more cautious about future estimations. Proponents of desirability and transformative strategies for peace display deductive reasoning based on preexisting concepts, whereas advocates of feasibility and maintenance approaches demonstrate *inductive* thinking sensitive to context-specific information. Undergirding these processes in strategic assessments, the construal level theory presupposes the dynamic of communication fluency. In other words, civilian and military leaders' predispositions toward either desirability or feasibility will determine the flow of information and whether the incoming data are accepted or rejected.

Rapport suggests that the semantics of "postwar" be reformulated. The semantics of "post" makes reconstruction endeavors more of an afterthought, and the "post" verbiage buys into a sequential scheme of arranging operations instead of a fluid model of cooperative interaction. From this descriptive analysis, he offers a prescriptive remedy to the problem: instead of sequencing or paralleling phases of the total operation, he suggests overlapping the coordination of waging war and planning peace so as to harmonize stabilization considerations with

kinetic aims. To that end, greater joint agency collaboration between military and civilian leaders—both desirability visionaries and feasibility organizers—must take place for abstract ends and concrete means to synergize in the range of military operations. By bringing the *why* of desirability and the *how* of feasibility together through interagency cooperation, U.S. presidents and their senior advisers will be better equipped to win the peace, and not simply the war, through a continuum of joint operational planning.

Overall, Rapport's use of construal level theory for understanding the gap between *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum* is persuasive. Readers must decide whether this particular theory assumes too great a role in explaining the lack of correlation between war fighting and state building and, in the process, minimizes the cultural, political, and economic factors that frame the context and motivate the power brokers of a given historical period. For scholars and students, policy makers, and warfighters, Rapport's interdisciplinary work in history, international policy, and psychology is a fascinating study worth the time and money to read and heed.

EDWARD ERWIN



*Outsourcing Security: Private Military Contractors and U.S. Foreign Policy*, by Bruce E. Stanley. Lincoln, Neb.: Potomac Books, 2015. 238 pages. \$25 (paperback).

Bruce Stanley, a retired Army officer and professor at the United States Army's School of Advanced Military Studies, has written a detailed and well-documented

volume on the recent use of private military contractors by the United States Department of Defense and their utility. He has done this by taking a scholarly, microeconomic approach to assessing how and under what conditions the military has most recently employed private military contractors within the context of overall U.S. foreign policy.

While Stanley begins with a clear, easily understandable introductory discussion of what private military contractors are, how they differ from mercenaries, and why they are valuable to the U.S. military today, he later delves into the microeconomic model's concept of supply and demand as it relates to private military contractors within theaters of operation. He provides all the economic, mathematical, and statistical modeling and analysis that a postgraduate student might desire. However, readers who have a "diminishing marginal utility" for the nuances of academic economics may safely bypass the in-depth mathematical discussions and proceed to his qualitative discussion of this subject.

Stanley's book looks at four recent U.S. military engagements, each of which saw the use of private military contractors: DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM (1990–91), Bosnia (1995), U.S. operations in Afghanistan (2001 to very nearly the present), and U.S. operations throughout the Iraq war (2003–12). He examines the similarities between these engagements, the existing demand for the contractors' services, and how the various contracted providers were able to supply those services for the Department of Defense.

Stanley maintains a balance in his examination of the use of contractors in the performance of our military's mission. He does not delve into the oft-heard

complaints from many in uniform that contractors are solely in the business to make money. Frankly, all business entrepreneurs are in business to make a profit; it is a crucial part of the very fabric of America. Profit is the entrepreneur's reward for assuming risk within the marketplace. Indeed, the protection of capitalism is among the fundamental reasons our armed forces exist. This suggests a tolerant view of those engaged in business in general; and private military contractors in particular share substantial risk to life and limb to support our armed forces. Since the end of the Cold War, the Department of Defense has successively and significantly reduced the numbers of active-duty personnel. While the numbers of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines have fallen, the mission requirements of our armed services have not diminished. As a result, in an effort to use our uniformed service members in the business of actual combat tasks, the Department of Defense and its subordinate military departments and combatant commands have resorted to using contractors to provide the many logistical and other supporting service tasks necessary to support their combat operations.

Stanley's study includes the sobering numbers of civilian military contractors wounded and killed in these various theaters. Over certain periods, the casualty numbers experienced by some private military contractors closely mirrored those experienced by soldiers. His book provides a deeper understanding of the very real risks these companies and their employees have faced in the support of our deployed service members.

The United States has successfully conducted recent and current military operations to support our foreign policy.

Readers should note that doing so requires us to maintain both a sufficient number of uniformed armed forces personnel and a treasury sufficient to fund both military operations involving soldiers conducting extended combat operations anywhere in the world and the significant expense of hiring private military contractors to perform the support services necessary to enable them. This economic model, while currently feasible and tenable for the United States as a wealthy nation, may not work for another nation with more-constrained resources. In the future, while the “demand” may be there and the “supply” of contractors may still exist, if a nation does not have the financial resources to pay for those contracted services, this model might not work.

*Outsourcing Security* is a valuable read for military and civilian defense professionals. Stanley applies a thoughtful analysis to what many may have thought they understood, and his work brings both depth and academic merit to the topic.

NEAL H. BRALLEY



*Success and Failure in Limited War: Information & Strategy in the Korean, Vietnam, Persian Gulf & Iraq Wars*, by Spencer D. Bakich. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2014. 344 pages. \$35 (paperback).

This groundbreaking treatise by Dr. Spencer Bakich, visiting lecturer in political science at the University of Richmond, endeavors to explain America’s mixed success with limited war since 1950 by way of a new theoretical approach to analyzing policy-strategy formulation and execution at

the highest levels of government. For the purposes of his theory, Bakich characterizes limited wars as those fought at a high level of intensity for limited aims but whose outcomes “are of a considerable consequence for the states involved and for the broader international system.” Furthermore, restraint is necessary to avoid escalation—a tendency of limited wars. Not surprisingly, Bakich focuses his analysis on four preeminent case studies from the “American century”: the Korean War; the Vietnam War; the Persian Gulf War (Operation DESERT STORM); and the Iraq war (Operation IRAQI FREEDOM).

The book’s first two chapters are largely theoretical. Bakich points out how established approaches such as “rationalistic strategic choice theory” and the “foreign policy decision making (FPDM) school” cannot fully explain how information influences strategy, or its outcome, in war. He argues that organizational theory does not capture the true nature of relationships between strategic leaders and national security organizations. As Bakich writes, “A gap remains in our understanding of the sources of strategic success in [limited] war.”

To bridge this gap, Bakich confidently posits his “information institutions” approach. Simply put, it is the pattern of information flow between those at the apex of power and their national security organizations that predisposes states to success or failure in limited war. The information institutions approach suggests that top decision makers served by an information-rich and densely networked national security apparatus should have a better grasp of the strategic environment and experience greater military-diplomatic coordination in planning and execution, significantly

enhancing the effectiveness of their limited-war strategies. Bakich carefully explains the methodology used to test his theory and introduces two direct competitors: organizational culture theory and democratic civil-military relations theory. Key propositions on strategic performance are also tabulated to test each of the three theories against the empirical data (the four case studies).

In the next four chapters, Bakich convincingly demonstrates how only the information institutions approach correctly predicts (or explains) both the military and diplomatic strategic outcomes in all four limited-war cases, with the competing theories falling short in one way or another. For example, in the Persian Gulf War, defeating the Iraqi army without fracturing the international coalition defined strategic success for the United States. The information institutions approach alone correctly anticipates military and diplomatic success in the Persian Gulf War. Organizational culture theory expects both military and diplomatic failure (given the extant organizational culture characterized by a military-dominant conception of war and a Jominian norm of civil-military relations), whereas democratic civil-military relations theory forecasts military success but diplomatic failure (given divergent military and diplomatic strategic preferences). The book's final chapter nicely encapsulates the results of the aforementioned analyses and their significance for theory and policy. One finishes the book persuaded that the information institutions approach offers a more satisfactory explanation for America's mixed military and diplomatic results in limited war than do the alternatives.

Interestingly, Bakich's emphasis on institutional as opposed to organizational relationships in ascertaining the pertinent information flows reveals the often-disproportionate influence of key individuals in the decision-making process. In the Korean War, MacArthur's near stranglehold on strategic intelligence available to top policy makers was abetted by John Allison (in charge of the Department of State's Office of Northeast Asian Affairs) arguing for American intervention north of the thirty-eighth parallel, against the advice of State's own Policy Planning Staff—with disastrous results. In the Persian Gulf War, President George H. W. Bush's personal, "hands-on" approach to information gathering, down to the analyst and desk-officer level, was tempered by National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft's and his deputy Robert Gates's deft management of the interagency process. These and other anecdotes will keep the reader engaged and enthusiastic about the book.

With over eight hundred endnotes gleaned from more than four hundred authoritative sources, this is first and foremost a scholarly work. Those in the international relations community seeking to understand the puzzle of America's recent strategic performance in limited wars will find this information institutions approach a worthy adjunct to the more established theories. Those who read purely for pleasure will enjoy the four case studies, each offering a unique take on the various policies and strategies crafted and the decisions made at the highest levels of government. In short, the book has much to offer, to the serious reader and dilettante alike.

DERRILL T. GOLDIZEN



*Fu-go: The Curious History of Japan's Balloon Bomb Attack on America*, by Ross Coen. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2014. 296 pages. \$28.95.

The world recently commemorated the seventieth anniversary of the surrender of Japanese forces at the end of the Second World War. Even seven decades later, however, little-known stories of various military operations are being published that provide insight into ways the Pacific War was fought using remarkable technology and ingenuity. This is very much the case with Ross Coen's fascinating book, which provides a detailed discussion of the use of the first unmanned intercontinental weapon: the *fu-go* balloon. These attacks were, at the time, the longest-range attacks ever conducted in the history of warfare.

In his carefully researched and richly documented book, Coen weaves the story of an improbable project that succeeded in launching upward of nine thousand gas-filled balloons from the Japanese home island of Honshu to attack the North American coast in late 1944 and early 1945. At least six hundred of these balloons are known to have actually made it to the United States and Canada, carrying antipersonnel and incendiary bombs. The intentions were to kill individuals; set forest fires in the heavily timbered Pacific Northwest; and demonstrate that Japan could attack the American mainland, thus creating panic and anxiety.

Once this bizarre form of attack was recognized by U.S. military forces, strict censorship was exercised on press and other media outlets, which were forbidden to publish any information about the silent attacks against which there was little defense. This lack of

public awareness led directly to the only combat deaths to occur in the continental United States during the entire war. On 5 May 1945, a group of hikers came across a crashed *fu-go* balloon near Bly, Oregon, and in the process of trying to determine what the device was they caused it to explode, killing twenty-six-year-old Elsie Mitchell and five children.

The *fu-go* balloons were cleverly designed to make the transpacific crossing by using an automatic altitude-control device to drop sandbag ballast at intervals as the hydrogen-filled balloons rose and settled owing to the solar heating of the gas envelope. The balloons flew as high as thirty thousand feet to capture the prevailing easterly jet stream, carrying them across the Pacific in as little as three days. A *fu-go* measured approximately thirty-three feet in diameter, was constructed from laminated *washi* paper, and was supported by nineteen thousand cubic feet of hydrogen.

The censorship that resulted in the Oregon deaths also had a more positive effect by denying the Japanese any knowledge about whether the balloons were successfully crossing the ocean. Facing increasingly destructive raids on the home islands that made the manufacturing and launching of the balloons more difficult, and with no indication that the attacks were succeeding, the program was abandoned in April 1945. (The last balloon recovered in North America during the war was found near Indian Springs, Nevada, which is near current-day Creech Air Force Base, the home of the Predator/Reaper drone program.) Balloon remnants have been found as far east as Michigan, and as recently as October 2014, when a balloon was detonated by Canadian bomb-disposal personnel in British Columbia.

Today's headlines are filled with discussions questioning the ethics of launching unmanned weapons (drones) against targets when nearby innocent civilians might be killed or injured by an attack. It is interesting to reflect on the ethical ramifications of launching thousands of unmanned weapons (the *fu-go* balloons) against an entire continent, with no ability to predict within thousands of miles where the weapons would strike or who would be injured or killed. Such attacks today would certainly violate the law of armed conflict, but they must be judged within the context of warfare in the last century.

I strongly recommend this book to those with an interest in the technology of warfare, and to those who may have heard of the balloon bomb attacks and thought them to be almost-mythical events.

JOHN E. JACKSON



*Reconstructing a Shattered Egyptian Army: War Minister Gen. Mohamed Fawzi's Memoirs, 1967–1971*, ed. Youssef H. Aboul-Enein. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2014. 320 pages. \$10.94.

Few states in modern times have seen their military beaten as badly as Egypt did in 1967—and have that military survive. Even fewer, perhaps no others, have then deliberately rebuilt that defeated force to a point at which a mere five years later it could again offer battle and, arguably, produce victory. How the Egyptians accomplished this has been something of an incomplete and little-known story up to now. This is mainly due to a lack of translated articles and writings penned by senior Egyptian

leaders. Youssef H. Aboul-Enein has, with this volume, begun to fill in some of the major gaps in the account.

Aboul-Enein's book is actually a collection of articles initially published in *Infantry* magazine. Each of the original accounts was written by General Mohamed Fawzi, the man handpicked by Nasser to build the defeated and demoralized Egyptian forces into a professional, combined-arms military that could retake and hold occupied Egyptian territory. Fawzi served as war minister for both Nasser and Sadat and was the master architect of the stunningly successful creation of professionalism in the Egyptian armed forces. His voice, despite whatever biases and personal axes to grind he may bring to the table, deserves to be heard, and Aboul-Enein's translation gives Fawzi that opportunity.

Fawzi's challenge was massive. The pre-Fawzi army was much more involved with state security than with power projection or war fighting. As the 1967 war had revealed, the Egyptian armed forces, even with Soviet equipment, were woefully inferior technologically to Israeli forces. The Egyptian army was riddled with low morale and displayed an apparently well-deserved inferiority complex. Its soldiery was, for the most part, uneducated and poorly trained. The Egyptian high command was overcentralized, overpoliticized, and, as events had proved, unable to exercise anything like the command and control required in modern combat. The end of the war both left Israel with strategic depth and turned the Suez Canal into a natural defensive barrier that was further fortified with a series of formidable defensive positions.

Fawzi admits to having certain unusual advantages in accomplishing his



mission. Nasser was willing to give his new war minister as close to a blank check as could be imagined. Nothing was more important than securing a victory and expunging the shame of 1967. Furthermore, the Soviet Union became a guaranteed supplier of military hardware, not only making up the quantitative Egyptian losses but substantially improving equipment quality as well. Fawzi makes the point that the Soviets were less motivated by a common ideology in this effort than by the need to prove that their equipment was at least on a par with that of the United States, and to maintain their geopolitical position in the region. Fawzi also confirms that the Soviet presence on the ground was extensive, that Soviet forces not only advised but performed certain military duties as well.

Fawzi brought new capabilities to Egypt and improved others. Surface-launched ship-to-ship missiles, modern surface-to-air missile batteries, new armor and aircraft all entered the Egyptian inventory. Fawzi understood, however, that new hardware would not be enough. Military-school attendance was increased, and the military's intellectual capabilities expanded. But beyond that, he explains, the three-year "war of attrition" that Egypt waged against Israel (1967–70) was a deliberate effort to blood the Egyptian army, test new tactics, and deploy new forces. Over this period, Fawzi argues, the Israeli forces came to embrace a defensive mind-set, while the Egyptian army became imbued with the spirit of the offensive. Although most books claim Israel won the war of attrition, Fawzi claims this was not the case. According to Fawzi, not only did Israeli jets increasingly avoid Egyptian airspace, but Egyptian

soldiers underwent quantum improvements as well—and these improvements were the real war aims of this period. It is also clear that whatever strategic deterrent the Israeli leaders thought they might have against the Egyptians did not work when it came to preventing at least a limited war. As the Egyptian army began to believe in itself, Fawzi and his officers crafted plans for what would become one of the most successful set-piece battles of the twentieth century: the 1973 crossing of the Suez Canal and the breaching of the Bar-Lev line.

Reproducing the *Infantry* articles, complete with their original and somewhat repetitive forewords, gives the book something of a choppy feel. It is also clear that this work is a synopsis of Fawzi's memoirs, not a complete translation. Some readers will be left with a desire to know more. Not surprisingly, the focus of the book tends to be at the strategic level. Readers who want more tactical details will have to find them elsewhere. Unfortunately for our understanding of Egyptian perspectives of how the war was waged, Fawzi was relieved of his duties two years before the war began and was arrested for conspiring to overthrow Sadat, so this critical element is sadly lacking. However, these shortcomings pale when compared with the value inherent in this work.

RICHARD J. NORTON



*Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Military*, by George E. Reed. Lincoln, Neb.: Potomac Books, 2015. 216 pages. \$26.50.

Although the term "toxic leadership" has recently come into vogue, the U.S. military is no stranger to the phenomenon.



Any current or former member of the armed forces can usually provide a firsthand account of a leader he or she believes was toxic. So even when a very healthy dose of skepticism regarding anecdotal reporting is applied, it is surprising that senior military leaders have not paid more specific attention to evaluating to what degree toxic leadership has affected their services' personnel and their performance, and to determining what to do about it.

George Reed, who carries very respectable credentials as both a former Army officer with twenty-seven years of experience and a civilian scholar, has at least begun to examine toxic leadership in the U.S. military seriously. For those interested in understanding this type of leadership, *Tarnished* is an excellent starting point. However, as Reed is laudably quick to point out, more work—much more work—is required.

The study of leadership is as fraught as it is vital. There is not even a universally accepted definition of the term. The field abounds with conflicting theories, mountains of individual case studies, and an ever-increasing number of blandly self-assured “how-to” books of questionable utility. *Tarnished* is a welcome change of pace.

Reed begins by defining toxic leadership as “demotivational behavior that negatively impacts unit morale and climate.” Reed then explores how toxic leaders behave and why; in many cases, their seniors in the chain of command may fail to recognize these behaviors and even reward these leaders. This, not surprisingly, is in marked contrast to the perspectives of toxic leaders' subordinates and the deep and lasting negative impact that results from working for such a leader. Loss of productivity,

decreased communication of necessary information to senior leaders, and rampant dissatisfaction with not only the leader but the service are just some of the consequences Reed documents. But as serious and at times tragic as these results can be, they pale in comparison to the loss of combat effectiveness such units could experience and the potential cumulative impact of toxic leadership on the profession of arms.

Reed makes a convincing case that a toxic leader's behavior likely stems from feelings of inferiority, which, when combined with narcissism, creates a potentially disastrous mix. The manner in which toxic leadership often involves ethical breaches is also examined.

Among the useful ideas presented in *Tarnished* is that toxic leadership is best viewed along a spectrum. At one end are found true psychopaths, whose numbers in the military are likely to be few. At the other end of the scale are individuals with behaviors that may actually be correctable, or at least mitigated.

Part of this book's allure is Reed's healthy understanding of reality. He notes that losing control in the moment or having a bad day does not make a leader toxic. *Tarnished* does offer suggestions for those sentenced to work with toxic leaders, but Reed has the candor to admit that these suggestions may not work. This is a refreshing change from books that suggest that “speaking truth to power” will result in a happy ending, or those that, having identified a problem, offer no solution.

This is not to suggest that *Tarnished* is without flaws. In discussing specific cases, there is a tendency to identify toxic leaders as “a Navy captain,” or “a visiting field officer.” If these cases are in the public domain, then providing

actual identities would be better. Although it is ostensibly devoted to military leadership, civilian cases do at times move into the narrative. There is also a surprising lack of historical cases. Were Admiral King, General Patton, and General LeMay toxic leaders?

Does the answer matter? One of the more difficult questions involving toxic leaders is, Do results ever trump their behavior? *Tarnished* claims, quite reasonably, that how leadership is delivered can be as important as what it delivers, or even more important. But is that always true? Another question that will leave most readers wanting more is whether, and to what degree, the culture of the U.S. military and the nature of the profession of arms rewards (some would say demands) attributes from leaders that, if not toxic, may seem very similar. However, when all is said and done, *Tarnished* is a most welcome addition to the discipline of leadership. It belongs in the handful of books that should be on the shelves of both scholars and practitioners of leadership.

RICHARD J. NORTON



*The China Dream: Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era*, by Liu Mingfu. New York: CN Times, 2015. 288 pages. \$24.99.

This 2015 publication of the English translation of *The China Dream*, originally published in Chinese in 2010, merits reading by a wider Western audience wishing to understand a clear exposition of a conservative, hawkish view of China's approach to international relations. The author, Liu Mingfu, is a retired People's Liberation Army colonel.

The book does not necessarily represent the mainstream view of the Chinese general public or the official Chinese government position, but it does ring more true to the spirit of Chinese president Xi Jinping's current thinking than it did to former Chinese president Hu Jintao's approach when the book was released in Chinese over five years ago. The fact that the foreword for the book was written by Liu Yazhou, a princeling political commissar of the National Defense University, gives the work gravity within the Chinese defense community.

Henry Kissinger spent four paragraphs in *On China* (2011) summarizing Liu's views regarding China's grand goal to become number one in the world, thereby restoring its historic glory. According to Liu, this is to be done through cultivating "martial spirit," not through "peaceful rise." The inherent conflict in U.S.-Chinese relations is portrayed as a "marathon contest" or "duel of the century," as if world politics is a sporting event between a champion and a major contender for the global championship. Kissinger follows his discussion of the Liu triumphalist view of the national destiny debate with a much longer analysis of State Councilor Dai Bingguo's more moderate reaffirmation of the peaceful rise strategy.

Liu begins the first chapter by paying homage, Chinese fashion, to his ancestors, laying out his interpretation of the visions of Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong, and Deng Xiaoping for turning China into the world's leading nation. Getting to the crux of his argument in the second chapter, "The Fight for the Century," Liu clearly blocks out the results of five centuries of global political competition. Citing George Modelski's hegemonic stability theory that there is an approximate

one-hundred-year life cycle for global hegemony, Liu names the champions: Portugal in the sixteenth century, Holland in the seventeenth century, Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and America in the twentieth century. Maybe China had a fleeting world championship title in the fifteenth century—not through colonial conquest, but through tributary recognition of the center of world power. Liu's argument is that China is back—to claim the champion's title in the twenty-first century.

The rest of the book elaborates how China can become the world champion by drawing on lessons from former and current champions, especially the United States. For instance, Liu notes that American strategy included an internal strengthening phase of isolationism under President Washington, a century of regional consolidation under the Monroe Doctrine, and world power generation under FDR's globalism. He also likes America's "cheap rise": in other words, coming late to both world wars, but concluding those wars with the victor's share of the spoils. Comparing China to America, Liu notes that China underwent domestic consolidation under Mao and Deng, and has its eye on being king of Asia, with the ultimate goal of being king of the world.

The first champion's goal, toward achievement of which China is well on the way, is to become the wealthiest nation—because all world champions have been the wealthiest nation. All world champions have also been the strongest military power—hence the focus on martial spirit. In terms of strategy, Liu prefers Sun Tzu to Clausewitz, pointing out that China will seek to win without fighting. In what may seem like a non sequitur to Americans and many

others, Liu continually repeats the theme that "the first nonhegemonic champion nation in history will appear, and that nation is China." However, he also refers on multiple occasions to China as king, and the difference between kingly thinking and hegemonic thinking is ironically opaque. Liu refers to the United States as "one country, two systems," meaning democracy at home and hegemony abroad. Since Liu prefers to see China exercise democracy abroad and hegemony at home, we could also refer to China as "one country, two systems," but with practices inverted from those of the United States of his characterization.

For those who like the sporting analogy, the book is an entertaining read and an enticement to place one's bets on the grand sporting event of world politics. On a more sober note, Liu's world view rings more true to current Chinese policies than to those of five years ago. President Xi Jinping gave his "China Dream" speech in November 2012, apparently somewhat influenced by Liu Mingfu's book of the same title published two years earlier. Thus, the recent translation is food for thought that should be chewed on by a wider Western audience now that it is available.

GRANT RHODE



*Logistics in the Falklands War*, by Kenneth L. Privratsky. Barnsley, U.K.: Pen & Sword, 2015. 248 pages. \$34.95.

Major General Kenneth Privratsky, USA (Ret.), highlights the importance of the integration of combat operations and logistics in this book about the Falklands War of 1982. *Logistics in the*

*Falklands War* is the result of years of research, begun when Privratsky was at the Army's Command and General Staff College in the mid-1980s and continued while a fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. Most of all, the author wants the reader to "appreciate the extent of the efforts behind the victory" rather than simply present a logistical view of lessons learned.

The book begins by examining British and Argentine claims on the Falkland Islands before walking through the sequence of Argentina's invasion threat and subsequent invasion; Britain's mobilization and deployment; combat operations; and the aftermath of the conflict. He highlights the key role of industry during the rapid mobilization. Commercial ships were quickly modified for the war. For example, the cruise ship *Uganda* was converted to a hospital ship in only sixty-five hours once it reached the shipyard. This included modifying its interior spaces for a clinic, surgical facilities, and labs; installing a helicopter deck; adding equipment to produce fresh water; and applying Red Cross markings. In total, fifty-four ships were taken up from trade, outnumbering the number of warships involved. Privratsky aptly describes the outload as rushed and gives readers a sense of being on the docks during the unchoreographed flurry of activity. Many converted commercial ships were designed only for pier-side off-loading; however, once in theater, supplies and equipment had to be transferred to vessels capable of shallow-water operations. Off-loading difficulties and concerns over Argentine air strikes sent *Queen Elizabeth 2* home with "seventy percent of 5 Brigade's 81 mm mortar and 105 mm gun ammunition . . . buried in lower decks."

Privratsky argues convincingly that logistics was the center of gravity of the campaign. The movement of ammunition, supplies, and equipment—whether by shallow water-capable ships, helicopters, or backpacks—dictated the pace of the ground war. The author's thorough research, including interviews, leads to a comprehensive description of the combat operations and movement of supplies and equipment from the amphibious landing zone on the west shore of East Falkland on D-Day, 21 May 1982, to the surrender on 14 June 1982, at Port Stanley, the capital on the east shore of East Falkland. The British, with their firm resolve and their jointly trained and professional military forces, tirelessly got the right supplies to the right place. His vivid description of the harsh conditions on the Falkland Islands reinforces the importance of the integration of combat operations and logistics. Nevertheless, although that integration was successful, "[b]y the time the Argentines surrendered in Stanley, some [British] artillery batteries were on their last rounds."

In many ways, Britain embarked on a "come as you are, bring what you can" affair to reclaim the Falkland Islands from Argentina. The remote islands' formidable terrain and inhospitable climate—along with the hostile Argentine military forces—exacerbated the difficulty of moving supplies and equipment, which directly impeded combat operations. As Privratsky writes, "Wars sometimes occur at times and in places least expected." And a lack of bullets, beans, and fuel can cause unplanned pauses to a campaign plan or, worse yet, leave troops alone and exposed.

Privratsky firmly believes that effective combat operations are enabled by integrating combat and logistics units and

conducting realistic training. Privratsky's insights could also apply to humanitarian affairs operations, especially if a natural disaster has destroyed piers or off-loading equipment, or occurred in a remote location without prepositioned stores. Military operational planners and military history enthusiasts should add this book to their professional library.

CYNTHIA K. SEXTON



*The East Asian War, 1592–1598: International Relations, Violence, and Memory*, ed. James B. Lewis. London: Routledge, 2015. 418 pages. \$178.

The Japanese invasion of Korea, known in the West as the Imjin War, has been largely overlooked by Western scholars. While Stephen Hawley's *The Imjin War* and Kenneth Swopes's *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail* are excellent works, those wishing for a more thorough treatment of some of the issues leading to the war and a more succinct history of the war itself have had to rely on Korean- or Japanese-language sources. However, James B. Lewis's *The East Asian War, 1592–1598: International Relations, Violence, and Memory* now fills the void, offering a variety of perspectives on this seminal conflict among Korea, China, and Japan.

Lewis has assembled an impressive list of international scholars representing a variety of academic specialties. This book is far more than a simple military or political history of one of Asia's largest conflicts prior to the twentieth century. It is divided into three parts, the first an examination of the international and domestic background to the conflict. Japanese and Korean scholars assess the issues that led to a deterioration

of relations between Korea and Japan. Economic issues, including trade disputes, predominate in this section, and set the stage for a review of the war itself, which is the subject of the next part of the book, simply entitled "War."

The nine chapters that compose the section on the Imjin War present the reader with a wealth of information previously unavailable to an English-language audience. These chapters rely almost exclusively on either primary-source material in Japanese and Korean or secondary sources from scholars in Korea, Japan, and China who have provided their own accounts and interpretations of this conflict. Each of the belligerents gets a thorough review, covering political, military, cultural, and social forces that shaped the six-year-long tragedy that has come to be known as the Imjin War. From a military perspective, readers will find plenty of groundbreaking information on the naval aspects of this war, which featured the largest maritime expedition in history up to that time. The valiant resistance put up by the Korean navy against the invading Japanese is worth a separate book in itself.

The third and final part of this book should not be overlooked. Examining the "impact and memory" of the Imjin War, these five final chapters provide the reader with a review of the ways in which this conflict helped shape attitudes among China, Korea, and Japan over the ensuing centuries. Whether through literature, art, or fashion, this conflict left a lasting impact that Western audiences would have had a difficult time discerning prior to the publication of this book.

There is a comprehensive glossary and index at the end of the book; however, the term "glossary" is a bit misleading,

as this section is a traditional index, albeit an inclusive and very useful one. The references are all listed at the end of each chapter, and readers will be impressed with the breadth of sources used to put this book together. In light of the many challenges facing East Asia in the twenty-first century, Lewis's book should be read by anyone interested in some of the antecedents to the political and cultural tensions that exist in that volatile part of the world. Both general readers and scholars alike will find something of interest in this impressive work. It is highly recommended.

JEFFREY SHAW



*The U.S. Naval Institute on Naval Cooperation*, ed. Sam J. Tangredi. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2015. 224 pages. \$21.95 (paperback).

*Naval Cooperation* is an anthology of essays on the employment of maritime forces in security cooperation and partnership missions, taken from the U.S. Naval Institute's periodical *Proceedings*. The Naval Institute Wheel Book series represents an analogy to the practice of a naval officer keeping a pocket-size notebook, or "wheel book," that served as a ready reference of accrued and evolving knowledge and experience. This book places maritime force partnership and cooperation in a strategic context by evaluating the relationships among maritime partnership, operations, and strategy. This approach facilitates examination of the relationships among strategy, strategic objectives, and global maritime partnership, moving the reader to consider not only the relationship of partnership to strategy but the intended outcome of partnership activities.

One of the interesting elements of this collection is the variety of experiences and perspectives its authors represent: U.S. and international chiefs of service; flag officers who commanded fleets; maritime theorists; and senior and junior naval officers from U.S. and international navies. The articles reflect these contributors' personal experiences in cooperation operations ranging from counter-piracy patrols off the coast of Africa to disaster-relief missions in Asia, multilateral exercises such as Rim of the Pacific exercises (i.e., RIMPAC), and military-to-military maritime training events. Each article receives an editor's introduction to both its topic and author. These introductions are especially helpful in contextualizing the different periods in which the articles were written and the relevant cooperation and participation issues.

Geoffrey Till's 2005 piece "Navies and the New World Order" is notable for its assessment of trends within the contemporary security environment affecting the international maritime system. Till argues that the sea is transforming from a domain of peer-to-peer naval competition to one that requires collective action in defense of the established norms and rules of the international maritime system. This will require partnership and cooperation among navies to guarantee maritime security in support of the global economy, while protecting an international system of transportation at sea from the constant threat of criminals, terrorists, and pirates, and to project power ashore in support of stability.

Admiral Michael Mullen's "1,000-ship navy" concept, the Global Maritime Partnership (GMP), and the 2007 maritime strategy "A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower" (as well



as Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus's 2015 revision of the same) then provide the thematic foundation for the book's articles on cooperation and partnership.

This anthology initiates a discussion of which types of missions and tasks are included in GMP. Collectively, they can be developed into a naval cooperation operations framework or operating concept, as described in the U.S. maritime strategy. GMP missions can be conceptualized across a scale of complexity from combat operations at sea, through maritime operations in support of combat operations ashore and freedom-of-the-seas operations that include naval operations to secure seaborne commerce and trade, to training activities such as multinational or bilateral exercises and military-to-military engagement.

In a 2014 article, Admiral Jonathan Greenert and Rear Admiral James Foggo consider the employment of a "Global Network of Navies" in the execution of GMP. Their concept does not focus on the specific number of ships engaged in maritime partnership activities during a specific period, but rather concentrates on the collective effect of a flexible network of partners engaged in cooperative operations and independent national and naval tasking in the maritime environment.

Other contributors argue that GMP can be used to accomplish common naval tasks among navies, thereby conserving resources by replacing one state's maritime forces with international naval forces. For example, in an article originally published in 2013, Rear Admiral Michael Smith, USN, argues that U.S. naval planners should include allied and partner navy contributions in operational plans. The opposing view envisions GMP as an employment that diverts forces

and resources from national military commitments and operations into missions that build partnership capacity.

*Naval Cooperation* brings the "wheel book" analogy to life. It inspires reflection on previous arguments and observations regarding maritime partnership and cooperation by providing a collection of ideas from the past. This collection enables a comparative or trend analysis of the objectives and impact of U.S. maritime strategy over time. This edition stimulates further evaluation of the effectiveness of partnership and cooperation activities and their progress toward those objectives. This book will stimulate a reader's thoughts on the opportunities and challenges of global maritime partnership and cooperation among international navies.

SEAN SULLIVAN



*Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, by Karen Armstrong. New York: Knopf, 2014. 512 pages. \$30.

Karen Armstrong's *Fields of Blood* may be an unconventional choice for traditional military historians; it is more a work of comparative religion than a work of military history, and attention to military matters of strategy, operations, or tactics is thin. Nevertheless, for historians interested in the causes of wars, the social and cultural history of war, or the relationship between religion and violence more broadly, Armstrong delivers an important addition to a growing interdisciplinary literature.

Armstrong, though not an academic, is well known for her sweeping, expansive works on comparative religion, with a



particular emphasis on the Abrahamic traditions. Known for books such as *A History of God* (1993) and *A Case for God* (2009) as well as *Islam: A Short History* (2000) and *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time* (2006), Armstrong has staked her claim with religious apologists. In *Fields of Blood*, Armstrong takes on Western secularist critics who argue that religion is a fundamental source of violence in the modern world (and was in the premodern world as well).

Instead, Armstrong argues, our modern conception of “religion” is inadequate for understanding the intimate relationship between the sacred and the secular that existed before the early modern period and the development of the secular state. Armstrong instead sees the origins of systemic, structural violence as inherent in the development of agrarian civilizations, which she explores in chapters on Eurasia, the Indus valley, China, and Mesopotamia. Armstrong contends that emerging religious systems served both to explain and to rationalize, and in some cases to reject, the violence endemic to the maintenance of empire.

In the second part of the book, Armstrong explores the development of Christianity and Islam and concludes with a long chapter on the traditions of crusade and jihad. Armstrong rejects an essentialist version of either Christianity or Islam that would mandate violence, and instead places both into a more nuanced political context.

In the final part of the book, which covers the ground most familiar to the average reader, Armstrong details the development of the modern Western idea of “religion” as being personal and private; the advent of Lockean political philosophy that advocated the separation of church and state; and the rise of

the liberal, secular nation-state. The last several chapters are devoted to understanding religious backlash against this trend of secularization. Even here, Armstrong rejects the premise that “fundamentalism” is inherently violent, writing, “Only a tiny proportion of fundamentalists commit acts of terror; most are simply trying to live a devout life in a world that seems increasingly hostile to faith” (p. 303). In this last part of the book, Armstrong also seeks to make sense of terrorism and “global jihad.” Unsurprisingly, Armstrong places culpability for both at the feet of colonialism, modernity, and political struggle, and suggests that “religion” may motivate actors on nearly any side of a given conflict. She writes, “Identical religious beliefs and practices have inspired diametrically opposed courses of action” (p. 393).

*Fields of Blood* is a survey; certainly scholars of any region and era will find details with which to quibble, and they may believe that one important event or another is treated too cursorily. Yet as an introduction to the complex historical relationships between the world’s major religious traditions and violence, it serves its purpose quite well. And given the recent attention to religious extremism and the rise of Daesh (also known as ISIS, ISIL, or the Islamic State), Armstrong’s work should be taken seriously by any who wish to understand the complex interplay among religion, politics, economics, and violence. Although Armstrong rejects the view that religion is inherently violent, this work takes an important step toward understanding religion as simply epiphenomenal to political violence.

JACQUELINE E. WHITT

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OUR REVIEWERS

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*Edward Erwin* serves as command chaplain of Naval Air Station Sigonella, Sicily. He holds a PhD in theology and ethics from Duke University.

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*Thomas Grassey* is a retired Navy Reserve captain. A graduate of Villanova University, he received a PhD in philosophy from the University of Chicago. He served on the faculty of the Naval War College and is a former editor of the *Naval War College Review*.

*Alexander B. Gray* is currently senior adviser to a member of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on the Armed Services. The views expressed here are his alone.

*John E. Jackson*, Captain, USN (Ret.), has done extensive research in the areas of lighter-than-air flight and unmanned aircraft. His latest book is *U.S. Naval Institute on Naval Innovation*, published by Naval Institute Press in November 2015. He has flown five different commercial airships and wrote the chapter on Navy airships entitled "Ships in the Sky" in the book *One Hundred Years of U.S. Navy Air Power*, published in 2010 on the occasion of the centennial of Navy aviation.

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*Karl Walling* served as an interrogator in the U.S. Army, 1976–80. He was awarded a double doctorate in social thought and political science from the University of Chicago in 1992. He has been a research fellow at the Program on Constitutional Government at Harvard University and the Liberty Fund. He has been a professor of strategy at the Naval War College, first in Newport and currently in Monterey, from 2000 to the present. His publications include *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government* and (together with Bradford Lee) *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality*.

*Jacqueline Whitt* is an associate professor of strategy at the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama; before that she taught history at the United States Military Academy. She is the author of *Bringing God to Men: American Military Chaplains and the Vietnam War*, and is currently working on a project on narratives of national security since 1945. Her research and teaching interests are in the cultural and social history of war and strategy.



## REFLECTIONS ON READING

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*Professor John E. Jackson of the Naval War College is the Program Manager for the Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program.*

*By provoking us to free our minds of constraint and convention, worthy science fiction allows us to create a mental laboratory of sorts. In this place, we can consider new problems we might soon face or contemplate novel ways to address old problems. It sparks the imagination, engenders flexible thinking, and invites us to explore challenges and opportunities we might otherwise overlook.*

GENERAL MARTIN DEMPSEY, USA (RET.)  
FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

The Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program (CNO-PRP) exists to encourage sailors to read books that are relevant to their careers and, in a greater sense, books that unleash the power of reading to improve their lives in and out of uniform. The eighteen nonfiction books in the current program should be merely a starting point for literary exploration. There are scores of reading lists to be found on the Internet, each with a particular focus or purpose or both. Some strict list compilers limit their recommendations to nonfiction books, somehow believing them to be more appropriate to whatever agenda they are addressing.

I would argue that in many circumstances stories told in fictional contexts can be even more effective in shaping one's thoughts and in developing one's ability to think and act creatively. Since the CNO-PRP was launched in 2006, featured books have included Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Patrick O'Brian's *Master and Commander*, and many other works of fiction. Without question, fiction can be powerful.

General Dempsey's comments cited above speak to fiction's ability to create a "mental laboratory" in which new and unconventional ideas can be considered. His thoughts appear in the foreword to a recently published book by the Atlantic Council's Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, which produces a wide range of possible future war-fighting scenarios. The Center's Art of Future

Warfare project seeks to investigate how emerging antagonists, disruptive technologies, and novel war-fighting concepts could shape tomorrow's conflicts. Its fascinating new e-book entitled *War Stories from the Future* is available for free download (in multiple formats) at [www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/books/war-stories-from-the-future](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/books/war-stories-from-the-future). The price is right, and the ideas are stimulating.

The CNO-PRP recommends another stunning consideration of future warfare, *Ghost Fleet: A Novel of the Next World War* by P. W. Singer and August Cole, as a Title of Interest. The Reuters news agency describes the book as

[f]ascinating. . . . Though it is fiction, the authors have taken great pains to keep their storytelling realistic. . . . *Ghost Fleet* has a certain weight. Cole and Singer are so steeped in future wars that they depict the fighting—on the ground, in space and on the Internet—with an air of indisputable authority. . . . *Ghost Fleet* is full of wonderful moments. It's got space pirates, drug-addled hackers out of a William Gibson novel and American insurgents fighting occupation in Hawaii. Cole and Singer make these fantastical elements work, and weave them into the story.

Admiral James Stavridis, USN (Ret.), Supreme Allied Commander, NATO, 2009–13, and current dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, has written the following about *Ghost Fleet*:

Global war between China and the United States—unimaginable? Hardly. In *Ghost Fleet*, Peter Singer and August Cole lay out a plausible, frightening, and pitch-perfect vision of what such a war could look like in the near future. This page-turning marvel is the best source of high-tech geopolitical visionneering since Tom Clancy's *Red Storm Rising* and Sir John Hackett's *The Third World War*. A startling blueprint for the wars of the future, and therefore it needs to be read now!

And Admiral Jonathan Greenert, the thirtieth Chief of Naval Operations, calls the book “[a] page turner. . . . Thoughtful, strategic, and relevant.” *Ghost Fleet* is a great read, and a great idea generator. While it is unquestionably a work of fiction, it includes over four hundred footnotes that describe the emerging technologies employed by both sides of the postulated conflict and link readers to sources for further research. It is a complete package.

Inquisitive minds from every age group frequently ask, “Will you tell me a story?” Skillful writers of fiction can respond to this request in ways that can be eye-opening, challenging, and rewarding.

JOHN E. JACKSON